
THE WORLD WAR II ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT'S GOVERNMENT-OWNED CONTRACTOR-OPERATED (GOCO) INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES: JOLIET ARMY AMMUNITION PLANT TRANSCRIPTS OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 4

interviews conducted by
Rita Walsh
Patricia Wingo
of
GRAY & PAPE, INC.

U.S. ARMY MATERIEL COMMAND HISTORIC CONTEXT SERIES
REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS
NUMBER 4C



GEO-MARINE, INC.



US Army Corps
of Engineers
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**THE WORLD WAR II ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT'S
GOVERNMENT-OWNED CONTRACTOR-OPERATED
(GOCO) INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES:**

**JOLIET ARMY AMMUNITION PLANT
TRANSCRIPTS OF
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS**

interviews conducted by
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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

This report presents the transcripts of oral history interviews conducted as part of a project to document the World War II-era construction and operations of the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant (JAAP), near Wilmington, Illinois. The interviews were conducted under United States Army Corps of Engineers Contract No. DACA63-93-D-0014, Delivery Order No. 014; the transcripts of these interviews were completed under United States Army Corps of Engineers Contract No. DACA63-93-D-0014, Delivery Order No. 89. Both these projects were undertaken as part of a larger Legacy Resource Program demonstration project to assist small installations and to aid in the completion of mitigation efforts set up in a 1993 Programmatic Agreement among the Army Materiel Command, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and Multiple State Historic Preservation Officers concerning a program to cease maintenance, excess, and dispose of particular properties. As part of the larger project to develop the national historic context of seven sample installations on a state and local level, the major focus of the project at JAAP was to document the impacts that the facility had on the state and local environments during the World War II period.

All the interviews were conducted by Gray & Pape, Inc. (Gray & Pape), under subcontract to Geo-Marine, Inc. (GMI), during February and March 1995, and the tapes of these interviews were transcribed by the personnel at Professional Transcription Service, Dallas, Texas. Duane Peter, Senior Archeologist at GMI, served as Principal Investigator. Rita Walsh, Historian, and Patricia Wingo, Assistant Historian, at Gray & Pape, conducted the oral history interviews.

The five interviewees all either lived in the Wilmington area or worked at the Elwood Ordnance Plant (EOP) or the Kankakee Ordnance Works (KOW)—the two facilities which were combined to form the present-day JAAP—during World War II. Robert Eaton, an Elwood resident all his life, worked at EOP during construction; during the ensuing winters, when he was not farming, he held positions at KOW. Eaton was also one of the first participants in the government's agricultural leasing program involving land within the boundaries of the facilities. Sam Harris, of Bourbonnais, Illinois, was employed at Elwood Unit of JAAP in 1949 and worked there until retirement. Although his work history at the facility began after the end of World War II, Harris contributed valuable information about the equipment and operations at the facility. Harold A. Holz, who now lives in Wilmington, resided on his family's farm approximately two miles east of EOP during World War II. As part of a farm crew, he helped harvest corn fields in the area that later became KOW. He was also employed as a government munitions inspector in Group 3A at EOP prior to the beginning of his World War II military service. Dorothea Smith moved to Wilmington from northern Wisconsin in 1944 with her husband, who took a job in TNT production at KOW. Their first home in the area was one of the prefabricated houses built by the Federal Public Housing Authority in Wilmington for employees at EOP and KOW. Richard Tyler, the son of a grain elevator owner in Elwood and still a resident of that small community, worked briefly at EOP before he joined the navy. Although he agreed to be

interviewed, Mr. Tyler later requested that his interview (transcript and tapes) not be released to other researchers, therefore, it is not included in this document.

The contributions provided by these individuals have been invaluable. The time and effort they took to participate in the project is greatly appreciated.

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BOB EATON
February 27, 1995
Elwood, Illinois
Rita Walsh and Pat Wingo, Interviewers

This is Rita Walsh. I'm with Gray and Pape, cultural resources consultants in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Patricia Wingo, who's also employed by Gray and Pape in Cincinnati, and we're interviewing Robert Eaton of Elwood, Illinois, on Monday, February 27, 1995, in connection with the history of the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant.

May I make a comment? This is Bob Eaton speaking. I'm going to be interviewed and my answers may appear to some people as braggadocio and bragging where I've been. That is not my intention at all. In fact, I'll try to be careful with my answers so that anyone hearing this tape will not . . . I don't want them to feel that it is bragging situation. It will just be whatever questions that I'm asked will be those incidents of the experience I've had both living adjacent to the arsenal, being involved in the arsenal as an employee, both on production and somewhat on the construction and leasing land to farm for a good many years. In fact, I've leased continuously since the arsenal, and the government leased the land for agricultural purposes. So now I guess we're going to go for questions.

And I want to let you know that some of the things we talked about the last time we were here, I'm going to ask some of them again so we can put them on tape.

Let's hope the answers are similar.

But first I'm going to have you talk about what it was like when the plant was first being projected and the construction period, and then we'll get into the operating history. So were you living right around this area when you first heard the plant was going to be built?

That white house down there.

To the west?

Yes. The boundary of a farm that we had just taken over or purchased was adjacent to what the boundary of the arsenal originally ended up with, although a railroad track divided us. And we had seen and heard rumors that perhaps our property would be in the arsenal. Consequently, we were quite concerned.

Do you remember what month that was that you heard about that? Was it September?

The month, I cannot give you that because it was over a period of probably three or four months that the rumors were coming. I do recall, though, that when it was firmed up, there was a meeting in Wilmington at a large dance hall there--it took one that big to accommodate the crowd--and I attended that, and it made a very distinct impression on my mind that is with me yet. To see these people who definitely knew their farm was going, people who had owned these farms for generations. In fact, there's one particular farm out there in the arsenal, it's still part of it, it's in the safety area. It was a Redden property and that property, the title was from the government originally, back to the government again.

On the Kankakee side or on the Elwood side?

That is on the Elwood side. And so what really impressed me at that age--I was 18-years-old--and to see some of those big, hefty farmers--I sure wouldn't have wanted to meet any of them in the dark; they were

tough cookies--when they knew there was no recourse, that their property was going to be an arsenal and to see them break down, cry, it affected them so much, because owning a piece of ground and farmed it and your father walked over it, your grandfather walked over it, you don't price that or you sacrifice everything you can to keep it. So the social aspects of the plant, and I like to use the word plant rather than installation, the social aspects in the community were horrendous for a while. To what it affect the social affects of the economics of the city of Joliet, which is the largest city here, and to Elwood and Wilmington and Manhattan, the affects of all that money in a time when all that money I'm referring to, the economic affects, the employment affects of the arsenal being built here, and many, many, in numbers, a great larger number, the population in the total community . . . (hold on) . . . this whole area, not only Will County, but this part of the state, was great. Oh, this was bonanza, but we people who lived here and were affected, it wasn't quite so great.

Tell me about what Elwood's reaction was, the community of Elwood? It was the closest community to the plant.

The community of Elwood, they were affected tremendously. There was a friend of mine at the time--two of them--one of them run a hardware store, the other one run the only grocery store, and the conversation between these two elderly gentlemen was the man from the hardware store, Augustine was his name, and the man in the grocery store was Bush, Mr. Bush, who had land that was being taken over by the government. He had farm land, a farm, a small farm, he not only lived on it but he worked it along with his store, and the comment of the two of them was the hardware store man, he says, "Well, you're better off than me. At least you can eat your stock." He says, "I don't know what I'm going to do with mine." Two elevators were in Elwood. One was a co-op elevator run by a group of stockholders. The other one was run by an individual. Well, with all the land being taken up, there'd be no future, actually, they talked there was no future for both elevators, but there was still plenty of room for one. So the board of directors, to sell the elevator, only they couldn't find anyone to buy it except the individual entrepreneur across the street with his, and he was able to purchase that elevator at probably a ridiculous price, and what I'm quoting this from is I had a good relationship with the man, the private individual, that owned the elevator, and he offered a ridiculous price to purchase it and the board of directors, no they wasn't going to have any part of selling it that cheap, and his reply was, he said, "What good's a battleship in a desert?" And that's where they were, see. He did end up owning it and then it was a bonanza that he bought it because it was a year or so after construction. Then the government started to lease out this land for farming and then the elevator was needed. And the man and his family are wealthy today because it was such a start for them, with the increased business, no competition and they're really wealthy now.

You were saying that Elwood, though, the community didn't really want the plant here and even went so far as to individuals wouldn't sell their lots for new houses?

That is correct. The people, for want of a better term, I'll say the newcomers that come into the community who would run the plant, they were just cold shouldered. They'd attend the local church, there was just an underlying current that they were outsiders and as you see, along with the construction at the plant, why many of the good homes were not sold off and personnel employed by the government lived in them. Many homes were built and these people were not permanent residents in the sense that maybe they'd be here for the tenure of two or three years or shorter periods, and they were a revolving population, but the community of Elwood, I will confess . . . if you're only here one generation, your family is still newcomers. It has changed since then, but 50-something years . . .

Is it about the same size, though? I know there are several new homes, lots of new homes?

Up until possibly 15 years ago, it started to grow just a little bit, but for a long period of time, why no, there was no new home construction at all. Nor did the town itself take advantages to accommodate more people in the town, take advantages, I'm referring to what was available by the government to encourage a city.

We're talking about sewer systems, water systems and such things as that. I recall a friend of mine who was in business after the plant was going. I don't know if I ought to put this on tape or not, but however, he says, "You know," he says, "the thing that's wrong with this town," he says, "we ought to have a few funerals in it." And then I had occasion to cite the same phrases maybe about 20 years later, 25 years later, when our alliance club was having a discussion about something. And I did, I said, "You know," I said, "we had those funerals that were talked about, but we still got the problem."

But Elwood did take construction workers in? There were a lot of boarders in [inaudible].

This was--excuse me for interrupting you--this was a great period, in a sense, for stories to tell. In fact, to find a bed for the early people that come out there, because employment in this area of the state, city of Chicago, Joliet, was . . . unemployment was rampant, prior to this coming in. And a job was a job was a job a job a job. Just people flocked for it. And if they had to come a distance, they had to have a place to put their head down at night. Such things were utilized and Elwood was great for this, people were great for that, but again, it was money. And so basements were curtained off. People lived in basements, anywhere where a person could lay down and go to sleep, there was a place for them. And there was no restaurants in the town of any consequence and the bars, there were only two bars in the place. They did a land office business. They did great.

Did they cash checks?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, were them good nights. (Laughs) And it was an interesting time to observe the whole social aspects of the community.

And your family boarded people as well?

Yes. My mother boarded-- in fact, I shared a bedroom with-- the only bedroom that was not shared in our house, because it was only a four bedroom house, but the only one that wasn't shared was my mother's room, and we were rather fortunate that those that come, stayed quite a while. And finally it got down to a delightful young girl came and was employed and again, it was another situation that she had her job and she was from the Princeton area and she had to go to work the next morning and there was no transportation of any kind, except driving clear back to Princeton and the roads at that time were nothing like they are now. The highways and that, they were narrow, crooked, and so she had to have a place and, of course, she had been recommended to my mother, who might have a room. So she come to my mother's and we had no room and my mother said there's no place for her. I saw her come in, I said, "Oh boy. Hey, Ma, find yourself . . ." (Laughs) Because at that time, I wasn't very . . . And so really, her name was Ruth Burls, and she prevailed temporarily to move in at our house and she and my mother shared a room. Now, you get a woman to . . . anyway, I thought it was remarkable, knowing my mother, that she would do it. So she stayed and she worked in the arsenal and . . .

On the Kankakee side or Elwood?

She did not work in production. The clerical staff of some kind.

Do you remember what the construction workers paid, as far as weekly rent or weekly board?

I'm trying to think. I think for sleeping, that was all my mother was involved in, was sleeping rooms, and it's possible that it would have been around 15, 20 dollars a week. And that was big money in those days. And now the people, there were some, I believe, if my memory serves me correctly, there was some people furnished food, room and board.

Do you remember the names of the two bars?

Oh, yeah. There was Bill Henry's, which still is, the Henry Bar, and the other one, I only patronized Bill Henry's. I've forgotten what the . . . (Laughs). I have forgotten what the other one is, although that bar is still in existence, and one of the things that there was an ordinance in the town that only two bars was all that could get licenses.

Were the construction workers that stayed with you, were they single men, young single men, or did their families come later? Did any of them stay to work at the arsenal later?

I'm trying to think back. No. I believe that, as far as my memory goes, they were all single men. I'll take that back. There was one man, and this was in the construction era, and he was a crane operator who was spotting concrete with a concrete bucket in the construction of the igloos and that's how come I had my experience working out there on the igloos.

In the Elwood?

That was over in the shell loading area, and the igloos were the storage areas for powder and live ammunition.

The workers, as many as possibly could boarded around here, but how far away do you think they came from? [Did you ever hear], they were coming from Chicago, itself . . .

Oh, yes. Chicago, because we had train facilities from Chicago right direct to within the arsenal.

Even during construction?

This developed in the construction time, and people from quite distances away came to this area to work and they might have to locate 35, 50 miles away. In fact, the time that I worked on the production, I worked with people that came as far as Watika, daily drive.

How far away is that?

It's well over an hour's drive today with good roads. And at that time, it was in the two hours. Well, it was a car load of lads that come from there. That is just one instance, but people communicated from a long distance. That was quite interesting when the tragic accident happened out here, out in the plant, excuse me, and there was addresses given of areas 65, 70 miles away, and those were people that commuted back and forth daily.

Do you remember who most of the construction workers were? Do you remember . . .

Ethnic groups?

Yes, ethnic groups.

I have to hesitate again because I want to think through this. Not really. (Phone rings) Nor were there many Blacks. Please excuse me.

(Recorder is turned off.)

. . . you had posed was did I recognize any ethnic groups. No. I do know that more than a few of the iron workers were Native Americans. I recall that.

From around here?

No, they weren't from around here. They commuted. They were brought in by contract. The biggest contractor, the contractor that had the contract for moving the concrete, the big mixer trucks, and he had some giants, was McCormick from out of New York, and oh, Lord, hundreds. The figure was over 100. Let's put it that way. It's a little more practical. But you just saw these big ready mixer trucks and we hadn't seen too many of them that size prior to that, and his contract was to . . . they had large yards where they'd prepare the concrete and then haul it out to the site and then dump it, and it'd be mixing on its way out there. A lot of efficiencies out here. Being a Midwest farm kid, it amazed me.

The yards were fairly close to the plant, though?

Oh, they were within the confines of the plant, and being serviced by the railroads. The engineers who made the location of the plant where they did, they did a good job so far as being able to get a construction with the roads and the railroads. One road was bad, but that would have been, at that time, was Old Route 66, but that was soon double lane pavement and a lot of road construction had to be done along with the construction of the plant in order to expedite getting that plant running. Because the powers that be knew that that plant--and I think a lot of the public knew--that that plant wasn't being built for the lend lease efforts to Russia and England. It was being built for what we were going to need it for.

When did you start working there in construction?

Oh, I worked there on construction--it was the second year--and on construction, I just worked through the winter.

And the rest of the time you were employed farming.

Yeah. I was farming for myself, see.

Do you remember what shift you worked? Did you work during the day only or did you work at night?

No. On that construction, it was day shift. And it was the construction of the igloos out there.

At Elwood?

Yeah. And the group that I worked in was pouring the footings and the walls. By golly, we worked on the complete job, but most of the time I was on the footing pouring of it.

And how was the weather, if it was the winter?

It wasn't good. Typical Illinois winter.

Did it stop work or did you just find ways to make it keep going?

Yes, I believe some. Not for very long periods. If you had an extremely bad day, maybe you didn't do anything, but as a rule, I think it was a general axiom that nothing got in the way of that plant. (Laughs) It was going.

Do you remember what you got paid?

Yes. Big money at that time for a kid off the farm. We got 80 cents an hour, and that was union wages. You had to join the union to work out there.

AFL, American Federation of Labor.

I guess. But, you know, when Saturday come along and you got time and a half, well then you were getting \$1.20 an hour and holy cats, over a dollar, but those wages went up pretty fast. That was in the early inception of the plant and wages did go up.

Do you remember what your title was, were you a concrete helper? Or what did they call you?

Got called a lot of things. (Laughs) That was facetious. No I was just a construction laborer.

So you worked for about three months then?

At that particular time, yes, and then when it got into production, then I worked shift work in production.

And when did that start? Next winter?

My memory doesn't serve me too good there, the exact starting of it, but I worked my eight hour shift and did my farming, too, because it was rotating shifts and again, I liked the money.

What do you mean by rotating shifts?

Well, one week you worked from the 8:00 to 3:30, 4:30, whatever it would be and then the 4:30, the swing shift, and the 4:30 to 11:00, and 11:00 back to 7:00. So you see, your days were kind of broke up and I do recall that I liked the midnight shift because I would come home at around maybe 7:30 and I'd have my whole day ahead of me that I could do what was required to do and I usually figured that if I spent from 24 to 30 hours in bed in a week's time, I knew it wasn't sufficient, but it had to be enough.

I was going to ask, when you were working in construction, were they, at that point in time, doing the fingerprinting and the photographing and the I.D. badges? Do you remember that?

Badges were pretty well required at all times, and I don't know if we were fingerprinted at that particular time or not, but of course, once production started, security was a continuously growing element in the construction, as it become necessary for more security, or imagined necessary for more security. And it was a very secure place for a long while. I mean it was a very secure place when activity ceased out there and we were involved in farming out there, it was a pretty secure situation. We had to comply with security. And we didn't think it was necessary, but it was government regulation and believe me, they're a pain in the fanny, them government regulations (chuckles), especially anybody that's employed by themselves. They don't want to put up with them, but we had to. But we didn't have to like it.

When you started working at the plant, did you get some training, orientation about what was done there, and how much did they tell you about the processes at the plant?

I'm assuming you're posing this question as when we worked in production. Yes. Yes. And yes again. It was imposed on us that we had to do our job right, we had to know our job, that we were perfectly safe. These other two factories were taken care of. Now, if we got smarter than the standard operating procedure and by that I mean if we thought we could take short cuts and things like that, it was hazardous. And the thinking of the operators, there was very few of that type because we knew that if we did the job right, it was a reasonable place to work, but if you screwed up, you screwed out (laughs) possibilities, and always your safety people, my experience again, remember there were thousands working out there, but my personal experiences in the change house scuttlebutt was that most of us had a lot of respect for the safety people. (Phone rings.) Please excuse me again.

(Recorder is turned off.)

. . . safety.

What did you do there? What was your first job?

Well, the first that I worked out there, I worked in the block press area, which TNT was compressed into small demolition blocks that were used for destroying bridges and buildings.

How many pounds?

Oh, they were small. A demolition block was two, 2 x 4, I believe, that was compressed and the block was set off with a fuse, dynamite fuse, and I worked as a grunt laborer in that.

Working a machine?

No. No, just moving the material from the block press area or taking them to pack houses, where they were, and in that, there was a lot of women that were employed in that. The story of Rosy the Riveter and what she did in the war efforts, I was amazed at what these women could do, not only physically. They weren't afraid to work, and one or a few of them had a good time working out there, too. (Laughs)

Did you make more money then as a production worker?

Oh, yes. At that time, the pay gradually went on up and I think it went up to \$1.70 an hour, and for shall we say unskilled labor-- unskilled labor was what it was--and . . .

Was your job tedious then did you think? Were you just doing something fairly routine?

For a farmer, it was a pain in the butt. It wasn't challenging.

Was it noisy there?

No, very. You were outside a lot pushing the what we called pluggies, pushing them from the block press area to where they were packaged, and of course this was all outside that you did it. One of the things that was very necessary in a powder plant was that you only had a few people and you had distance. You only had a few people congregated. Safety factors again. But that was kind of tedious work and from there, why, I went to the tetrol area, packing tetrol and running the pack house. And I think I had six men under me.

And those six men were the Jamaicans?

They were the Jamaicans, yes.

And they came later on?

Yes.

It sounds like, from what we read, 1944 is when they started.

Right. Well, when they come, we were getting down to . . . we knew the war was going to be over some day soon and it was going to be successful. And, of course, the draft had taken so many of the workers that they were used to supplement the workers that weren't there.

Why do you think they went that far to get them?

There just wasn't no place else to get them. I mean it was the grunt labor, and those who were deferred for whatever reason it may be that were young and healthy and strong, they, of course, had certain abilities to take much more responsible jobs and you didn't have to work in the actual production of the powder or in the actual production of the acids, as I spoke to before, and so long as you kept your mind and did the job as you should, with the SOP--that was a favorite statement--standard operating procedure, everything worked out fine. But you didn't have to deviate too far and you'd have supervision and everybody else worrying about . . . well, if you did it, supervision caught it, you were gone. You were a long gone cookie.

So a lot of the time when you were working, someone was watching what you were doing?

They weren't actually watching, but they had the tattle-tale and the tattle-tale was a graph on a clock, 24 hour clock, that would measure time and temperature, and when one was refining, my experience with it was refining in the tetrol area or when one was nitrating in the TNT area, that a person could look at that 24 hour sheet, and know what at each machine or nitrater or the refining pot, and he knew from these two, the time and the temperature and the amount of material, because that was also recorded, he knew what you were doing. And he knew when you were having problems and how you were coping with them. As I say, it was a very efficient tattle-tale, and they did not have to be in the building with you, and I'm referring . . . that was one of the foreman's job, to, on every shift, to see who on his shift was on the ball and wasn't the night before.

And how were the Jamaicans, as far as being good workers, efficient workers, hard workers?

You still haven't hit an adjective that will describe them. (Laughs)

I'm waiting for yours.

No. I had a lot of sympathy for them. Why did I have that? I suppose it's a natural sympathy I have for anyone who I think is unfortunate, and they were unfortunate because their limited knowledge, they were hard to communicate with, they had no friends, except just the little bunch they were with, and they were pretty well isolated and away from the rest of the workers. Probably wanted to be. It wasn't forced, but it's just the way I guess humans get along with each other.

Well, they were at Camp Des Plaines.

Yes.

That's where they were lodged.

And they were, of course, bussed to the area, to where they worked and I don't believe, I don't recall even seeing them in the change house. I think they may have been bussed directly into the plant and to the tetrol areas. I think that because as I look back and think back, I do not recall seeing a bunch of black faces, and another thing that we did not see at that time is I don't recall, I really don't recall, any number of Black people working out there. At the arsenal, where I was working, I don't recall seeing a number like you would see there now.

Could the Jamaicans leave and go into town if they wanted to? It was not forced labor. They were there on a contract I understand.

A question I can't answer . . . maybe they didn't even want to, you know. Why, or whether they did or whether they didn't, I'm totally ignorant.

Do you know of many who stayed for a long time?

No, I can't answer. The tenure of the Jamaicans out there, as I say, I worked with them. There was an eight-hour shift I worked with them, and about all I knew about them was they hated the diet they were on. The diet was all wrong and they couldn't possibly . . . they had no comprehension of how to cope with cold weather, and they were working outside, pushing buggies and various duties where they'd be exposed to the weather. And they thought they solved their problem by just putting layers and layers and layers of clothes on. Well, they put so many clothes on that they couldn't hardly move. So they weren't creating their own heat. And the temperatures were just, to them was horrendous.

But on top of all these layers, they had that uniform that had the K O W on the back, isn't that what your uniform was like? What color was it?

Yes, but all that was was what we called a powder suit. It was just a pair of coveralls.

What color was it?

White.

So you could see whatever was getting on it, maybe?

I don't know.

Did the tetrol turn them yellow?

I don't recall about the turning the clothing yellow, but it turned the individuals yellow.

I know you were susceptible to the tetrol. Do you think women were more susceptible or men?

Hey, I'll tell you on some of them it really made them glamorous.

Because it really turned their hair, didn't it?

Yes, it did, but then when they got too much of it, it didn't have quite as effect.

What did you think of your part in the defense effort? Did you view it as part of a patriotic effort?

Well, since the war, it's been one of my biggest disappointments that I was not part of it, of the actual . . . for a couple of reasons. One of them, I just wondered if I'd be able to measure up to whatever the task before. Yes, at the time, my farming that I did, it was important to raise it, not for the money that you made from it, but it was needed. It was part of the war effort. Then we farmers, we got our dose of propaganda, the effort and all that, it was put out to the farm people just as the active farm producers, and I believe that--now I want to be honest here--I was always glad to cash my paycheck, but also it was important to me . . . I would not probably have made the effort to work to be extra employed in anything that didn't, to my mind, have such affect to the war effort as that did. You know, everybody that lived then knew we were going to win the war. That was the thing to do. No, and really, maybe when I shaved and looked in the mirror, I kind of felt pretty good about myself that . . . and I was physically extended. I got to the point that I had to quit, when I was working in the TNT area--now, that would be in the Korean operation-- . . .

(End of Side 1; Beginning of Side 2)

I'm going to ask you about the Agricultural Lease Program.

We're switching gears here a little bit on the leasing of the land. I was fortunate to get a lease when the first lease was let, and at that particular time, I needed some ground real bad because the landlords on the farm that I was on were my mother and my uncle, and in the period that I was classified as a farm worker and the term was 'frozen' in that occupation, and we had the affects of losses, especially in the Pacific, of friends of mine that were being, many of them, killed, and some of them were killed in Africa, and I didn't like to be seen in crowds in town and that, and, of course, at that time, I was married down into the end of it. So I had informed my uncle, I said find a tenant for next year. I'm going to enlist. As I made the statement before, we were frozen in our jobs, and I recall at the draft board, with the lady that was in charge of it, she was awful tough of letting anybody . . . she wanted to take in all she could, especially related to farm boys, for want of a better term. Well, I had to make three trips into her office and appeal to her before she'd finally give me a release. I mean she was just as tough to get one off of if she didn't think it was necessary. I spent pretty close to a week in Chicago. My sister lived there at the time and so I was staying with her, and I was rejected in every branch of the service, and the last one--with the exception of the Army. I hadn't got to that, yet--but I was down at the Navy--the Navy was at the bottom of my list--and man, when I was rejected from that, I was disappointed, and I believe he was a Chief Petty Officer, if I recall correctly, that had the last say so, the little guys that are checking seeing whether you were warm or not, and he said, "Look, he says we got all the blankety-blank men we need." He says, "The services all have now," and he says, "You go back and do what you can do a hell of a lot better and go back on the farm." I said, "The farm that I have is leased. I go back there," I says, "I haven't got any land to farm." He says, "Go to work for somebody else." He says, "You know how to farm, but," he says, "you don't know how to run a battleship." I suppose there was a certain amount of . . . probably was right. Well, when I come back and my uncle had leased the farm, so I really didn't have . . . I had a limited amount of equipment to farm with because equipment was awful hard to get a hold of, but I had sufficients that had been acquired, and the leasing of the plant come up. And I sublet two pieces of ground from the person who was the successful bidder because the ground had already been bid.

Who did you lease it from?

I sublet it from Tyler, the elevator people, and let me think. Hell yes, hell yes, that was his favorite term. But anyway, he was the man that had a dealership in--oh, golly--an implement dealership. John Kline. I'm telling you that old mind of mine is really going. To put a bid in on the ground, to get some ground, well, then they were quite successful and they had a little more ground than they wanted and maybe they didn't want to farm it, so they leased it out, not leased it out, but I guess I probably paid them 50 or a dollar an acre or something like that over what they paid for it.

And it was on the Kankakee side? Was there land leased on the Elwood side?

Yes. On both sides. The particular ground I had was on the north and south sides of Hawk Road, going right in off of 53, and I was successful on that ground up until it was declared surplus. The ground at the north side of Hawk Road has been declared surplus and private individuals own that ground, between Diagonal and Hawk Road.

Did you grow corn?

Yeah, I grew corn. In fact, I was so stupid, I figured there was only one way to farm and that's what I . . . rotated crops and right off the bat, I tried to do a real good job, but most of it, corn, bean, the highest at that time, the most profit in it. Most farmers just grew corn out there. But I had rotation of corn and soybeans and oats. I was fortunate to be successful on that tract until the government declared it surplus and sold it back. It was a period of about 17 years, I believe. And the ground at the start, in the leasing, and what it brought, what we had to pay to get it, them were hay days compared to what we have to pay for it now. And

I leased crop ground out there down through the years, and in order to rent an acre of ground . . . times are changing and we had better inputs to work with and money changed. By that, I mean inflation. But when it got to the point where you had to bid over \$100 an acre for crop land, then it got too expensive for me. And I was getting older and I had other things going for me. So I ceased to bid on crop land, but I continued to bid on hay land, I grew popcorn out there on popcorn tracts and pasture land. And I have continued with that and I've got my fingers crossed for tomorrow because tomorrow is another bid day.

How did rationing affect you, the coupons you had to have? Did you have a car?

Yes. From the point of rationing vis-a-vis an operating farmer, rationing itself was no great hardship. Great hardship was that when production of farm equipment ceased and there was none available, when you couldn't buy cars, when you couldn't buy tires. Now, rubber, rubber was a problem, but we had all the fuel we needed, all the gasoline we needed, and we took advantage of it. By that, I mean we'd be allocated gas for the amount of tractors we had, we'd be allocated stamps for our pickups or cars. So you can readily see probably more than we needed. Let's put it this way--the local gas stations, or the gas station where I did my business, he always was a friend of mine, but he was a much better friend during that period. Now, it was another story if you weren't involved in agriculture because we needed these inputs and the period of rationing to public was so that there would be gas for gas to grow food.

And you had your own home garden for vegetables and fruit and that sort of thing?

Yes. Not too long ago, I was messing around in some of my mother's stuff and low and behold if I didn't come across an old ration book.

Did you hold on to it?

I did not throw it away. (Laughs) But don't ask me to look for it now, because neither one of us got time. One of the things, too,--I don't know if you'd want me to go into that or not--is that prior to the arsenal starting, [inaudible] just how it affects one individual in the community was that a girl I was dating worked at the J&R, and we'd been dating for a while.

What was the J&R?

That was a builder's supply store in Joliet. So she got a job working for the government in the administration area, and she worked out there. She worked out there until . . . she quit when her division moved to Chicago and she didn't want to commute. And, of course, when . . . you haven't asked me anything about the big explosion and I don't think you really want to get into it in your dissertation, but she was employed out there and recall what the affect of what happened the morning of that . . . the affect among the people that were employed out there. But I always kidded her. I told her, I says, "We'll get married when you think you can make enough money to keep me in the manner to what I'm accustomed." [Inaudible] two weeks she went working out there in the [inaudible] (laughing), and you know, and God love it, we were married over 44 years and I never let her forget that. (Laughs) We had a good time about it.

You were talking about the explosion. What year was that?

It was in the World War II operation.

And where was it? At the TNT or . . .

That was at one of the group shell loading plants.

Oh, over at Elwood?

Yeah.

And were you working that day or were you working on the farm?

I was not, in that particular period, I was not employed there at the time.

Did you hear it, the explosion?

Oh, yes.

What did you think?

Well, at the time it occurred, I was in bed. I don't know what it was, maybe 4:00 in the morning. Yeah, bang, the house rattled, and I picked myself up off the floor. It knocked me right out of bed, see, and just where it was. It was upstairs and the house moved with it.

[Inaudible] glass?

No, it did not break any glass in our house, but, of course, it did in some of them. In fact, it broke large store windows in Joliet. The affect of the explosion was determined in the areas as to where the rock, the sub-rock, and how close it come to the surface of various areas, and places a distance away would have reverberated more than some that would be closer to it. But it was not a site, and the fact that . . . I recalled one thing, that there was no addresses of people who were lost out there that were much farther away than possibly 40, 45 miles or so, and I always thought, I wonder if they just cut it off there, because there was . . . oh, there's been rumors and rumors and stories about that explosion yet.

You mean about what caused it or how many people were killed?

What caused it and bodies found and not found and parts and in fact, I just heard, within the last six months, of what could have been the cause of it. But it was just rumors, but very basically, you see powder in itself, there's no fuses to it, and it seems as though there was land mines packed in boxes and put in dinkies and also the fuses in another dinkie, but they would be right close together within the building. And this is just a rumor, but it seems as though that these products would be on pallets, so in order, the first pallet wasn't put in the exact spot and in order to get the other one in, they'd drive it with a sledge hammer, you know, and it's just possible that one person, he thought that--because this was a practice. It wasn't a safety practice, but then that's the story going off of SOP, and perhaps that could have set a pallet of the fuses off and then it was just wham, bam, thank you ma'am all the way through.

Did a lot of people leave employment with the plant because of that explosion?

I can't answer that question. I don't know.

I'm going to ask you one last question, unless you can think of something else, too. You talked about all the people who were on this land for generations and who were very sad about leaving. Where did they go?

Not too far away. Not too far away. Distance-wise, a lot of them repurchased farm, repurchased land, and the irony of it is that the soil in that arsenal is just about every kind you want to find. There's hilly ground, there's rocky ground, and many, many of the people--and we remarked about this--that it seems that those that had stoney ground and rolling ground and the soil type that they had, when they bought land again, they bought the kind with the same kind of terrain and ground and those that had the good land, bought good land.

Down there at the office, where you're coming from, the Morgans, some of them that bought around close. At that particular period, there was good farm land available to be bought. The people were able to, with what they received for the land they had here, they had money enough to buy comparable or better quality of land. At the time the government bought it, there was a price of improvements and there was the price of the land. And the improvements were the buildings and that, and so except emotionally, it was not too disturbing, the mere fact of the government taking over the land and the people had to go elsewhere, but please note I said that I said 'except emotionally', and emotions are terrible hard to live with and to be satisfied with. But again, this again was a reaction because we traveled across the United States, certain ethnic groups settle in certain areas to farm and make their living from the soil and the areas that they come from in Europe, western Europe, they come from the same kind of soil, same kind of terrain, it's one of those things, I guess, and we saw quite a bit of that, we that were lucky enough to be able to stay here and watch them poor fellows and people. We really felt sorry for them because they had to pull up roots.

Did they ever go back and visit their houses or were they allowed to or did they just want to start anew . . . ?

To visit their houses, their houses disappeared. The good ones were sold and moved onto ground adjacent. There's just an awful lot of houses around here that were moved out of the plant, and fact, I ended up with two small buildings from the arsenal, garages, and the first house I bought was--the wife and I bought, I should say--was a new house that was constructed out of lumber out of the plant of a barn that was tore down and was built. Much salvage of improvements was come out of the plant, and in fact, not too many years ago, there was buildings that were sold by the government that the government had utilized for residence areas and they no longer needed them, and people went in and bought them and moved them out, some great big houses.

I saw the one with the red tile down south of Elwood.

Down Wilmington Road.

Can I ask you a question about some peculiar houses? Rita and I always see these. There are four houses right next to each other on the Kankakee side of the highway. There's one that's gray and one is painted yellow, but they're four houses and they're all right next to each other, right on the road.

On 53. Those houses have no relationship whatsoever to the incumbence of the arsenal. They were houses that were built there for Tyler's big elevators sitting back there, which not only with all the improvements that they've put there, but it was a petroleum pumping station on a pipeline. And those houses were built for the workers of this petroleum, and them houses were there long before my memory started.

So they were built that closely together from the beginning?

Yeah.

They look very odd. They look like farm houses and they shouldn't be grouped that closely together.

That's what they were. They were houses put up by . . . one of the large petroleum corporations built it, but if you look back in Tyler's, there will be many, must be six or seven . . . it was a tank farm back there, and the Tyler elevator, although they weren't the ones that bought these tanks--there was another grain company in there--that used these tanks for the storage of grain. And then there was a concern by Al Book, when there was no [inaudible] crops raised out in the plant, and he seeded down hundreds of acres of alfalfa and made alfalfa pellets, had a dehydrator and some of those original buildings that were there and dehydrated alfalfa into pellets for supplemental cattle feed. He had a big operation.

Well, thank you very much.

Well, it's been a pleasure. It's been a pleasure.

(Recorder is turned off.)

I was dating a girl at the time in a real serious situation, and we got into, as I mentioned before, the discussion of what's good and what isn't good, and here I am coming from out here and the arsenal is a four letter word. That's all there was to it, many four letter words. This girl that I was going with, her father was a railroad man and how great that was for the railroads, all that's going to be shipped in there and what a great thing it was, and he was a pretty decent sort of a fellow and this friend of mine, her mother--hey, another story--but anyway, all of a sudden, I got my belly full because I was here, and practically anytime you got away from the ag community and you got away from those people who were close to it, it just, as to that land going away, no taxes on it, the government agencies to run, so for every one person that felt as the rural people did in the community, 99% of the rest of them were right for it. And we got into a fuss. I mean by a fuss, arguing about it, that--and this gal and I were, I'm telling you, we were down the road a long ways, and I ended up getting everything but physically thrown out, told to get out. Well, that hurt my pride or something, so the gal and I we talked, and I says, "Well, that's out. I'm not going to get involved in a family, By God . . ." I'm going to be a good boy or I'm not going to be in the family, you might say. That was one of the biggest traumas in my life over that, because it was a pretty important break up. But then I was lucky, too, because after all, I found somebody to put up with me for over 44 years, and gosh, how a woman could do that, I'll never know. (Laughs).

Did you say you had another story or no?

That was it. Again, it was just one social affect, and there was more of that. The other social affect of the plant, and I saw it, was that in some of the areas, working with the women and the changing of their attitude from that time--now you wouldn't even recognize it, but at that time, their attitude was that they were away from home, they just felt more at ease and communicating--don't misjudge me in the morality of it-- it just wasn't that. It was that that's when the female became . . . I could see it happened here, it happened in the rest of the world. That's when the female gender all of a sudden was discovered that they also had a life, too, and you ladies don't realize what your life is compared to two generations before you, in the marriage and everything else. It was just about part of the property and that was about it, you know. And now, the male gender has got to stay pretty close to a straight line because the female gender will tell him you either fish or cut bait and go for a walk. (Laughs).

(End of Interview)

SAM HARRIS
February 28, 1995
Wilmington, Illinois
Rita Walsh and Pat Wingo, Interviewers

And I'm just going to think of questions as I can think of them because . . .

I had these books here. It's by . . .

You have these, you said?

Yeah. I give that to [inaudible] whenever they closed down.

This was very helpful.

Yeah, well, it takes you back to the things that they've done in World War II when they started the groups up.

It did look like it was from about 1949 or so because they talk about things happening in '47 and '48 but it still looks good because it sums everything up, how many buildings are there and what were the problems and . . . so you started working here in 1949.

March the 11th.

And you are from this area or were you from the Elwood area or you're from where you live now?

I'm from Kankakee area. But I was born in Southern Illinois but I've been here since 1949.

And what was the plant doing in 1949 that you came here to work?

We were [inaudible] ammunition and also loading ammunition.

In 1949?

In 1949. It was under the government. We worked with the government from that time but, of course, it was before that, up until 1965. In 1965 Uniroyal took over as a contractor for the government.

So the government was a contractor through the Korean War period?

Yes. Yeah, it was government owned and government operated.

GO-GO.

GO-GO, yeah.

That's what they called them.

Yeah, GO-GO. (Chuckles)

At the same time in 1949 weren't they still making the fertilizer at the ammonium nitrate plant?

No, not in '49.

Forty-nine? They did it earlier then?

Yeah. In 1949 that was a steam out facility.

Steam out?

Yeah.

For steaming . . .

Yeah, projectiles and making small bombs and that's in Group 61 that the ammonium nitrate plant. Yeah.

Is any of that plant left?

The plant's still there, but the buildings are in terrible shape.

Yeah, because I did this same sort of project in (Ravenna), Ohio, and they had the brick ammonium nitrate plants as well. And the buildings were torn down fairly quickly because the process that they did there ate all the lime out of the mortar and the building just fell apart. But they had the brick. They couldn't be anything else. So they're not there anymore either. So which line did you work on, which group when you came in 1949?

I was in Group 4.

And that was shell loading?

Well, at that time we were [inaudible], tearing ammunition apart and salvaging the metal components and all of the explosives that was taken out of it to go to the burning ground.

And where was the burning ground? Where was that on the plant?

Have you been past Hemmily Dam over there, the Perry Creek, where the water crosses the dam?

I've never seen that.

Well, that was the burning ground.

So it was much further east of all of the . . . ?

Well, it's almost in the center of the [inaudible]. From here it is northeast from [inaudible]. And you can see it from the road, the burning ground area. All of your explosives at that time that was steamed out of bombs and projectiles were taken to the burning ground and also your projectiles that were contaminated, they were taken to the burning ground.

And they were exploded there?

Well, they were burnt. We had a procedure that we went through to where we put hay on them and such as that and lit it up and we burned it. Then after that, the steel could be sold at the market, so we decontaminated everything before it was taken to the salvage yard.

And you worked here until 1993, didn't you say?

Yes, ma'am.

Do you know if any of the equipment, in any of the buildings that you're familiar with are still from World War II? Have you ever heard of that, that there still was the same equipment or did they make so many changes?

No. There's some of the same melt load equipment. That's where we melted the TNT. That equipment is still here and in place [inaudible] in some areas.

Not just the [inaudible] but the whole . . .

Well, your melt units, like in Group 1, the melt units and the [inaudible], a couple of those are still there. When we went from Comp B to TNT, we went back and forth from Comp B to TNT.

You're talking about the 50s and 60s, taking Comp B to TNT?

Yeah, from 60s. Yeah. Did this in the 60s. We changed over to Comp B and then sometimes we changed to [inaudible] or maybe just changed the [inaudible], but there are [inaudible] in there that were there during World War II, 1941.

Now is that [inaudible]? I think they were the same units.

Yeah.

We went through Group 2. Art took us on a tour of the entire line it seemed like. I think we did see the entire line. And there were what looked like shell casings but they had hinges on them. What would those be? They looked like shells. They were about this high and they were two pieces in them, like a packing case for a shell that was still there, but shells had smooth bodies, didn't they? They wouldn't have had a hinge on it or anything. Kind of had like a clip, a locking clip on either side of it and then, of course, the tops screwed in with the hook.

So it would be [inaudible] around on the rim.

So what would that have been? Do you have any idea?

No. When we shut Group 2 down, they were running what we call an eight inch projectile [inaudible] of it, but if I could see that, I could tell you what it was. You don't know what building you were in, Building 12?

We were in the shipping area.

In the loading . . .

We were where they first come in and where they spray painted them.

Yeah, that's in Building 3.

Is that where they were or were they at the other end?

No, they were in that section that looked like an annex, I think, that was built onto it.

The first building you go into there is Building 3, and it's a receiving building and it's where we received the empty projectiles and then off to the side of that is Building 3A and that's storage area and now once the group . . .

And that was built a little bit later, wasn't it, 3A?

No. I'm talking about Building 3A in Group 2. See, all of our buildings start out with *(laughter)* . . . I don't care if it was Group 1, 2, 3A or 3, all of the buildings start out with your power house, which is 1. Then they go to Building 2, which is a paint storage building, and Building 3, 3A is off to the side of that, Building 4 and so on down the line, 1610, and a lot of those groups is probably got about 40-some-odd buildings, but when I say 3A, I don't mean Group 3A.

Right, you mean Building 3A.

Yeah. And once they shut those groups down and decontaminate the equipment, it might be down in Building 12, but they move a lot of it back up in storage Building 3A.

So building 3A, though, was there. That wasn't built later as far, as you know, because it looked like it was. The brick looked different.

Yeah. But that brick's been that color. It could have been built a little later but I know since 1949 it's looked that way. It's a different color brick than the rest of the group. Now building 12, the last building down, that's been rebuilt because that's the building that blew up.

And that was . . .

In Group 2.

. . . June of '43 or '42?

Forty-two, I'm pretty sure.

Do you think that you could tell us in each building basically what went on in that group if we showed you a layout? I'm sure you already know the layout, but we might need a visual aid.

Yeah. Now you're talking about what time?

Well, yours because you can't . . .

Yeah. Sure I can tell you.

I mean, you can't tell us about what happened during World War II. We just need a better understanding of . . .

This [inaudible].

(Paper shuffling.)

Where were the burning grounds? Just like right in here? This is the plant-wide layout. Oh, I'm sorry. This is north.

Group 23, right in this area. Right in here.

That's about where Ravenna's was, was right in the center as well. Is that because it could explode conceivably, they just wanted it in the center?

Well, you had to have quantity distance, no doubt, on your operating groups, such as that, so you probably had to have so many feet from the operating building so that's where you had the [inaudible]. Everything's centered here on a quantity distance [inaudible] big circle and you had to be so many feet from the some of the areas, but we can look at this if you want to, the burning ground and everything. It's pretty well all grew up there now, but when it was up and running we got, I think, four or six places where we sat the fire. Of course, the explosives were brought in and it was dumped out on these underground pads and we electrically ignited it back up in the shelter.

The pads were concrete?

Yeah. Now this here, see, this says Group 2 but it hasn't got a [inaudible] building.

Right. Just wanted to find out what the burning grounds were.

See, it tells you here. This is your power house up here and the same thing in each one of the groups, but some of the other groups has got more buildings than Group 2. But, anyway, here's your power house, starts here and then your next building is 2-3 and that's your receiving and painting. Now there's very little painting going on there because they're new projectiles and such as that. If you get one that's scratched up real bad or something like that, you can [inaudible]. And in Building 4, these projectiles are sent down on a monorail system from Building 3. They prepare them and put them in pallets and they put them on that monorail system. You might have seen that when you walked through there, and they are sent down to Building 4. And in building 4 they are loaded with TNT.

Tell us what TNT was like in its earlier stages. I've heard some really funny comparisons, applesauce, cocoa and all this food allusions..

Yeah, applesauce is as good as any.

And that's when it's poured into the shell. That's the consistency? And it gets heated up into that . . .

It's really a little thinner than that and it's probably almost this color.

Did your hair turn red like everybody else's?

Yeah.

Did people's hair turn red?

I didn't have too much to turn (laughter) but, yeah, I had a lot of hair back then. I mixed up a lot of TNT on the melt units and in the [inaudible].

It sounds like they were pretty simple units. You know what I'm saying? That there wasn't anything big mechanical thing going on. It was just sort of coming into the third floor and sort of being heated up and then dropping down and it didn't sound like a very complicated process.

We had what we call a melt floor operators and I was one at one time and we made up the TNT charges, and what you would do, we had what we call a melt unit and this melt unit was loaded with either TNT scrap or virgin TNT, and we would melt the TNT.

And it was dry at that point?

It was dry. And we would melt it and after it was in a liquid stage, we'd bring it down into the dock [inaudible] and that was what we would call a heel. We'd put the heel in there. Probably maybe 15, 20 gallon, and it was liquid. Then we'd start flaking that with virgin TNT.

You mean adding it?

Adding it to it and just keep building the charge. We'd put a little less liquid and a little dry stuff and these [inaudible] kettles held 150 gallons and we had some that went up to 350 gallon kettles.

And is a charge . . . that unit for each shell charges . . . when comparing charges, that's . . .

No, like in Group 2, they would pour the eight inch shells by hand and Group 1 and Group 3 on the 105 shells, when we were pouring 105's. We would pour 32 at a time in Group 1 and we'd pour 60 at a time in Group 3 out of what we called a multiple pour. But after our charge was . . . got it to the consistency, it'd be about 174, 176 degrees, we'd open the valve and that charge would go downstairs into what we called a multiple pour. And we pushed through it down there with funnels on them.

We saw the funnels.

Yeah, you've got to have the funnels and we'd pour like 60 shells or we'd pour 32. Now in Group 2, we didn't have multiple pours and those large eight inch projectiles, we'd pour those by hand. We had hoses off of the legs of the [inaudible] kettles and this woman or that man would pour one shell and the other one would pour another shell and then push them out of the way and they'd form.

When you did a multiple pour, how could you do 60 at a time?

They were cups, cups inside the multiple pour. If you walk over there and look up in one of those multiple pour you'll see that it's got all of these cups in there. And you got back in there you'd push a button and the vacuum would pull that up and it would level off these cups, 60 of them or 32, whatever group you were in. You put your [inaudible] underneath there, then it would pour 60 shells at a time. Now, in Group 2 they would pour the projectiles in Building 4. After they sat there for a length of time, you know, because they're loaded with the TNT, then they would transfer them down to Building 16.

Which was the last one, you said, right?

No. It's this one here. Down to 16 and that'd give you more cooling capacity. You know, you're cooling them here and you're cooling them there and you've got your quantity distance in between the buildings so you can have so many pounds of TNT or explosives in Building 4 and so many pounds in 16.

Now these barricades, what are they protecting? These, I know, are holding TNT but these aren't going to blow. It's to protect these buildings in case these ones blew first, right?

That's right.

Because these aren't that volatile in this state, right?

Right. The reason that you've got the barricade there is because you never had the quantity distance. You needed to be further away, and it wasn't, so they had to put up barricades, and that will protect this building down here. Now also in Building 16, we drilled the projectile. You know, just space the top of it, you know. Well, once you pull the funnel out, if you saw the funnels, it left a little ridge in the sub-charge cavity or in the neck of the projectile and we would drill that off smooth. Then the projectiles was transferred from there down to building 12 and they X-rayed them then they pulled the . . .

Every single one?

No. They were on a sampling basis. They may pull one shell out of 25 or they may pull one shell out of 50. It's whatever their sampling procedure was. Then the projectiles, they X-ray them in building 12 and if they X-rayed this one, and they say, "Okay, you can release so many shells out of building 16 up there to send on down the line."

And they're looking for air in them? Is that what they're looking for?

Cavitation. They looked for cavities. Also in building 16 there, there was projectiles for core melt in Building 4, too. After you pour a projectile and it sets for . . . they've got a required amount of time that they sit after they're poured with the TNT. They are called probes, you know. Put them underneath the probes and you remelt that TNT to take out any cavitation that would happen to be in there.

We saw those, didn't we?

Yeah.

We saw the probes over there.

Yeah, they're there.

Okay. They do that to every single shell?

Every single shell. And the same thing happens on a 105 projectile, too, when you're pouring TNT. Now when you're pouring Composition B, you do not have to core melt so you eliminate that step.

Is it a thinner consistency?

Well, Comp B, I'm pretty sure it's 65 percent TNT and 32 percent RDX and 2 or 3 percent beeswax.

Beeswax? (Laughing)

That's in cosmetics. Is that saving TNT? Is that why Comp B was used?

Well, for us, it was a better material to work with and it probably gives you a little more, you know, than just straight TNT. Of course, we had advantage here because we produced our own TNT and we could just transfer it across from here to that side and put it in the projectile.

Yeah. In the operating histories of Kankakee Ordnance Works in World War II, most of the TNT they made came over here. Some was shipped off to other plants, even Russia. Actually, a couple of times I saw that they were shipped to Russia, not very often. I'm curious here, once you drilled that shell cavity, when does the fuse get put in? Is that not ever done in this line? They're not putting the fuse in here. It's over at fuse loading?

At one time, we fused almost everything here.

In this line?

Yeah.

In this group?

No, not at this time, but earlier we fused everything. We produced our own fuses here, too. They made the fuses in Group 4, 5, 6 and 7, 8, 9. You know, in Group 7, they made the booster for it. In 8 and 9, they loaded the detonators. Then they assembled them in Group 4 and Group 5 and those fuses were transferred over to Group 1 for the major [inaudible] and everything was fused with the M51A5 fuse before we shipped it out of this plant. But later on, we didn't fuse anything. We put a nose plug in it and they wanted to fuse them in the fields so we put a, what we call, after the projectile here in Group 2, went from 16 down to 12 after [inaudible] and drilled. Of course, we done some of that in Building 12, too. We put a sub-charge in. Then we put a nose plug on it. We stenciled the projectile and zoned it.

And zoning it, what does that mean?

Weighing it. It had to be a certain weight. You had either a Zone 1, 2 or 3 so when they fired them, they knew maybe a Zone 1 would go a little farther than a Zone 2.

And a nose plug, what is that?

That's just a metal kit with threads on it. It'd just be flat on top. It screws it down in there. In fact, later on we went to a plastic one. It would just pop in there. Then they could pull this out in the field, throw it away, and put their fuse on it.

Have you heard of--just because it reminded me--in the fuse loading area, do you know what the Jumble and Jolt Test Building was all about?

Yeah.

How and what they did? And when they did it?

Yeah, these fuses that they made over in Group 4 and Group 5, they assembled them. They would send them down and it's a metal box and it's on a shaft and I think there's like two boxes, maybe three on a shaft, and the boxes are offset on the shaft where you put the fuses in the box and you turn on electric motors and you jumble and jolt those fuses.

When they're all completed or during the process?

Oh, no. After they've been completed and they want to test.

And that was done behind the concrete barricade, I'm assuming.

Yes.

But the fuse by itself would go off, wouldn't it? Or not?

Yeah, but there's not all that much explosive in a fuse. See, what a fuse does, a fuse will ignite the train in that fuse. It's got an explosive train in it. It will go down to the booster cup which is a tetrol pellet. Then below that you've got a sub-charge, which is two TNT pellets, about as big around as a half-a-dollar and probably three-quarters of an inch thick. You've got two of those. When the fuse detonates, then it'll detonate the booster on the fuse and it'll detonate the couple of TNT pellets, which we call a sub-charge, and that will explode the bursting charge on the projectile.

And what is the detonator, then? You said fuse detonator.

Yeah. It's just a firing train of that fuse. I'm sure you've got a picture of a fuse.

Yeah, somewhere.

Somewhere, and it'll show you that train.

But in the Jumble and Jolt Building when they were jumbling and jolting these fuses, why were they jumbling and jolting them? To make sure they didn't accidentally go off or that they were not set right?

Well, they want to make sure if they jolted them so much that they wouldn't arm themselves. Then that way you'd have an armed fuse on a projectile that you were shipping to another installation.

And how would it arm itself? Did it just get lodged [inaudible]?

Well, you've got little rotors and such as that in there and little springs hold them and one of those could pop loose. But they're suppose to withstand a certain amount of jiggling.

So they wouldn't accidentally go off during the transportation?

That's right.

You mean, while they were being shipped, like on a train or anything?

Or airplane or whatever. Yeah.

And what's a primer?

A primer is the same as a primer on a shotgun shell or a rifle shell. You've seen a shotgun shell?

Yeah, the little . . .

Well, you know, the firing pin hits that. That's a primer.

That's the little bottom [inaudible]?

Ah-huh.

And the percussion element?

That's part of the firing train, too.

All the things I ever wanted to ask someone, because I've read about this but it's still confusing.

Well, [inaudible] should have them up there, a picture of the fuse, and it should be color and it should show you the different things.

We'll have to ask. It's still easier though to have you tell us.

Yeah, but he had all of that stuff over in the blue barn in the showcase over there. He's got fuse books, and if you get one of his books . . . our main fuse out here was a M51A5 and if you get that, they've got drawings of it and it'll show you [inaudible].

Did you work in the fuse loading line at all or you're just familiar with what they did there?

No, I done some work there.

And was it mostly women? You said there were women in all three.

Had a lot of women.

And were they mostly young or all ages?

All ages. They had them here from World War II, Korean War. I had a group of women that worked for me that was here during all three wars, in World War II. Of course, I wasn't here but they were. Then they'd come back for the Korean War and the Vietnam War, and then most everyone on the LAP side in 1976 . . . yeah, we shut Group 3 down and at that time we probably had at least 85 percent women. It was hard to get men.

Do you remember any names of anybody that was here through all three?

Are they alive?

That's still alive, yeah.

Oh, yes. Yeah, I would think they would be some and I'll tell you, there's a woman in Joliet by the name of Toni Spesia and I think she's still alive.

Do you know how to spell?

S-P-E-S-I-A. Toni Spesia.

Is she married?

I believe she is.

Do you remember her husband's name?

Well, her first husband, I guess it was her first husband, he drowned in a hunting accident, but I think she got married again after that but she worked out here and she worked for me, but I'm sure if she don't go

back to World War II that she knows someone that does because she was pretty well up-to-date. And I know she was here for at least the Korean War and the Vietnam War and she might have been here during World War II.

This was the case at Ravenna or at least I got some hints for that but the women who worked at the factory during World War II, particularly on the loading lines, that they were considered more rock and that some women in town thought, you know, these factory girls were just someone you wanted to avoid socially. Do you ever . . .

No.

. . . have anything like that?

No, I don't.

Because there was a letter from a woman defending the women who worked at the Ravenna Plant and said something about, you women who stay at home and listen to your radios all day, and I thought it's the same thing as today. Women just stay home and watch TV all day but it was listen to the radio all day.

Yeah.

Do you remember if there was a newsletter?

We had one with Uniroyal that was called *Powderlines* and you should have copies.

We haven't found any. The only thing we found was the Ammo Echo from the mid-60's and that's it. We haven't found anything else.

You never had. See, Uniroyal, they go all the way back to '44, something like that, on the manufacturing side and then they come in on this side in '65, but they got their papers over there in the safety . . . the *Powderlines* that go way back.

Which office? Do you remember?

In the vault.

We've been in the vault [inaudible].

You didn't see the big books?

Big books?

The *Powderlines* were in large books.

What color are they?

I don't know what color, but when you find my picture . . .

Of course, how would we know? It's dark in there.

I'm in there.

Are you?

Yeah.

You didn't save your copies of the Powderlines? (Laughter)

But they go back [inaudible].

What were they names? We thought we read those?

The Detonator and the Bomb Shell.

Bomb Shell.

Those are the names we think were of the World War II era.

That, it could be because I don't recognize.

And they were for civilian employees at the plant.

*Oh, yeah. Well, the Army probably put it out, but I worked for almost 20 years for the government but I don't remember the names and it could have been there. But the *Powderlines*, the magazine they sent out [inaudible] and we can get copies of that. It's got to be in the vault.*

We'll go look.

Yeah, it's kind of hard to look for things in the vault because there's no light so we have to sort of . . .

Yeah, but you go in the vault. You know where the cage is at?

Yeah, the back, right.

If you go in the big door, then you turn to your right. And they used to keep that, the wire cage, because they had controls [inaudible] office, had their check printing system and such as that, but they were back there on top of the file cabinet, a map cabinet really, [inaudible] back in that corner. I wouldn't think that he threw them away, that Sandy or Pat didn't bring them over to you.

Brought lots of things over.

*They would have no reason to throw them away, I wouldn't think, but you never know. But we had the *Powderlines*. It was a nice little paper, the [inaudible] events that happened [inaudible]. Some new buildings, new projects.*

What was this area like in 1949? Was it still booming pretty much as far as you know? Were people still building lots of housing?

It was beautiful, this arsenal was, especially up around Group 60. That was our headquarters. When you came off the highway and come into the area, they had flowers planted all around those buildings. Even in the production group, it looked like your lawn at home. It was beautiful, the area. Of course, the Army, they run it at that time.

But they had to keep the grass short because it was a fire hazard?

Right. But they trimmed and they kept the grass short and the place looked like a golf course. The place really looked nice.

And there was a cafeteria, right?

Yeah.

Over by the administration building?

Yeah, they had a cafeteria. They had the [inaudible], too, which had, you know, a basketball place in it. And they had a tennis court. They had their hospital. And they had the cafeteria, the Army Mess Hall and they had bachelor quarters and then they had their NCO club was in that area. Then they had family housing which was called White Circle, and on this side of the plant, they had Brown Circle. Family housing. But the place was beautiful back in '49 when I first came here.

And the whole economy was pretty good around this area as far as you know?

Yeah. I would say that it was pretty good. We had about, I think, Uniroyal probably had 8,000 people working here at one time, late 60s, early 70s.

Well, we have so many questions to ask when we start doing things and we're like, "Why didn't we ask that?"

That always happens.

I know, and Art's not going to be here next week.

That's right.

I'm going to turn this off now.

(End of Interview)

HAL HOLZ
March 2, 1995
Wilmington, Illinois
Rita Walsh and Patricia Wingo, Interviewers

This is Rita Walsh and at this interview are Patricia Wingo. We're both with Gray and Pape of Cincinnati, Ohio, and we are preparing the history of the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant and our interviewee is Harold A. Holz, who is a Wilmington resident, who, as you may have heard earlier in the tape, had a number of roles in association with this plant. You want to be introduced as well? And his son, Art Holz, who is the management Agronomist here at the plant presently. Mr. Holz, I'm going to ask you lots and lots of questions, and you may not have the answer to them all, but I have this list that we can go on and on and on.

I'll do the best I can, as long as the coffee holds on.

Where were you living when you heard the plant was going to be built?

Living on a farm at Simmertown. Simmertown is a small community off the southeast corner of the installation, a rural community, I guess we got 100 people over there today. We lived on a farm with a Simmertown address. We being my mother, father and my brother, Kenneth.

Had you been there a long time?

We lived on that farm since 1928, when my folks bought that farm, yeah. And that's where we lived when we heard rumors of the Joliet Arsenal, then called just Arsenal was [inaudible], and you can imagine the amount of guessing and information that floated around as to where the arsenal would be built, where the boundary lines were going to be.

Bob Eaton mentioned that the newspaper presented several schemes and one day your land would be in and one day out of it.

Right, similar to that third Chicago airport that's now being discussed in nearby [inaudible], the speculation as to where it will actually be. Same thing occurred when this arsenal was being built. I recall that mom and dad were going to change the floor covering in the kitchen at the house, and the kitchen and the dining room was going to be . . . we didn't use carpeting in those days. That was mom's idea. But the kitchen was done and we didn't do the dining room because we might not be living here anymore. And that's how we heard about it. In reality, that whole farm, which we still own, is a mile and three-quarters from the present boundary line of the installation.

Were you working on the farm at that time or going to school?

I was going to school. My high school class was '41, so I was going to high school in Joliet. We lived in what was called a non-high school district, and that meant that that township would pay your high school tuition to any public high school that you chose.

And paid for the transportation?

No, just the tuition. We had some people out there who moved out from Joliet, the Hyatt's, and they were interested in their children going to the Joliet Township High School, which has excellent credibility at that time, probably still does. But it was decided that there were five kids out there needing to go to high school and we would all drive one day a week to Joliet. So that's why we went to Joliet. And we drove through

the arsenal until we no longer could. We would come over to Chicago Road, which is now Gate 28 on the south side of this Elwood unit, and then drive Chicago Road due north to Joliet.

That's one of the main roads in Joliet now, isn't it?

Right. And as construction proceeded here, we would find roads closed on the way to school in the morning and we'd go around them, because they were building. For instance, Group 1 crossed Chicago Road. They bulldozed the road out to build the group, and there was a lot of priority to building this installation at that time. We were at war, or about to be at war at that time, and they were not worried about five kids going to high school. In fact, we knew it would just be a matter of time until the gates would be locked and we would have to go around the installation, which we did.

So you avoided Highway 66? That was a pretty dangerous road, even back then?

Right. It was our parent's idea that we not drive on Highway 66. We drove Chicago Street in.

What was the reaction of the people around here when they heard about it? I mean you'd been hearing about it for months. Did they have an idea that it was going to be something different from what it turned out to be or what were the rumors that you remember? In an article about your neighbors' reunion, there was one woman who stated that there were a lot of low flying planes going around and they never knew what that was about, and then they heard about this being done, and said well, that's what it must have been.

Area photography.

Were there rumors of an airport instead?

Never heard that. No, the conversations that I can recall were only about an ammunition plant, an arsenal. We didn't know what they were going to build, but an ammunition plant. One of the early concerns that came about as the property lines for the plant were being developed was the impact that the installation would have on local governments, like road and bridge districts. Each township, each rural township has its own road and bridge business, which is run on tax revenues from land within the township. Now, for instance, Florence Township has had approximately a-third of its acreage base, tax base, removed by this installation. So it in reality impacted the cash flow for the road and bridge fund in Florence Township. It also impacted fire departments, school districts, churches. The Simmertown Church wondered where are we going to get our membership, because they were slicing off a big corner of what was their membership.

Weren't there churches within the boundaries of the arsenal? I read an article that said there were two churches that were moved. Do you remember . . . ?

I can bring to mind one, and that was called the Ridge Church, and it's up on the north Arsenal Road or Hawk Road, whichever you want to call it today.

And that's on the Elwood Unit side?

Yes. Another church--I'm not able to bring it to mind. No, I cannot bring to mind a second church. But there definitely was one church, that church was part of a . . . called a Sunday School Convention, if you will. The Ridge Church, the Simmertown Church, the Manhattan Church, the Shanahag Church and the Elwood Church, two Elwood churches, there were six churches in a district. They called it a Sunday school district. They weren't even all the same denomination, but they all got together once a year for a Sunday school convention in May or June, and yes, I was in that Ridge Church a number of times.

So your first job at the plant--I'm switching subjects now--was mowing hay. Is that what you said?

First job in the arsenal. The first job I ever had in the arsenal was working as a government employee as a munitions inspector, and we still won the war. As a munitions inspector in Group 3, where we made semi-armor piercing bombs. A munitions inspector sounds a little sophisticated, but in reality it wasn't that rated.

A. Holz: Didn't you once say to me that prior to that, weren't you cutting down [inaudible] out there, as a high school student?

H. Holz: Thank you, Art, yes. Let's back this up about . . . yeah, that is right. Your memory is better than mine and that's the way it should be. Yes, we had a Spring break in high school, in the Spring of '41, and the job opportunities in this community were unlimited. If you were warm and could walk, you could get a job out here working for the contractor who built the place. Yes, I got on a labor gang out here at the arsenal, and as Art just told you, he's right,--don't go away, Art--yeah, labor gang. They sent us down the hill on the west side of the arsenal, and they're going to build two power houses there and the south power house was built first and we went in there and we chipped cement so they could pour the next layers on the floors and we got that done and they gave us rakes and forks and sent us up to a corn field. And that corn field was actually the site of what is now the north power house, and they said they're going to build a building here of some kind. Get these corn stalks off of here, and we raked them up in a pile and a truck came by and we forked them onto the truck. Yeah, on the labor gang. This was in Spring vacation of '41. Spring break.

You remember what you got paid?

No, I don't.

Less than a dollar, obviously.

Probably, but I can't tell you exactly what. Everything was temporary in those days. The buildings were a wooden frame, covered with tar paper.

Where were they?

The contractors' buildings were down in the area of what is now the shop area.

In Elwood?

No, on the west side of the Kankakee Ordnance Works.

And where is the shop area in relationship to the TNT area?

It's before you get to the TNT area. The shop areas are those areas to the left. As you drive down the hill, the north power house is that big structure on the right. That's where the corn field was that we cleaned. And on the left, there's a series of buildings there now and they're made up of what still remains a permanent [inaudible] structures, the change houses, the automotive garage, the heavy equipment garage, and beyond to a warehouse and a water purification plant. And the temporary structures were located in between these buildings so that they could build the buildings without moving these temporary office and change house structures. It was all muddy. You went to work in the spring of the year, buy bucket overshoes because they couldn't begin to keep gravel and cement ahead of this construction.

And the weather was particularly bad that winter, wasn't it? At least a lot of rain?

I can't compare it, but it was mud. It was just endless mud. They kept tractors around to pull the trucks. I remember there were no ready-mix trucks, as we see today, with the rotating tubs. No. They had ton-and-a-half Chevrolet dump trucks and a central concrete plant, that if they were pouring concrete someplace, this Chevrolet truck went over there and he would get a load of mixed concrete from the back of that dump truck, and he would come out to the job site and they would pour it in the form or in wheelbarrows or whatever it was. A load of concrete was not precious. If the job was done or it wasn't ready for the thing, you just drove the truck off in the field and dumped the concrete in a pile and went and got another one.

And this central plant served both Kankakee and Elwood?

No, there was a central concrete plant on each side. I don't know the location of the plant on the west side. I'm saying west side. It was actually called the Kankakee Ordnance Works, KOW. The side that we're setting on now was called the Elwood Side, or EOP, Elwood Ordnance Plant, years ago. The cement plant on the Elwood Unit was at the farm called Ernest Friendly Farm, at the intersection of Chicago Road and Central Road on the southwest corner. He had an above average set of buildings, and they put that concrete plant in his barn is what they did, and heated the whole barn with a furnace. Got the job done. Used his house for an office building.

For that contractor?

Yes. Ernest Friendly.

Do you remember who the construction workers were? Did it seem like a lot of them came just from Joliet? Could you tell or did they seem like they came from farther away?

They certainly came from farther away. Keeping in mind that that time, 1941, we're just after a pretty good recession in the '30s. So there were geographic areas here in the middle west where job opportunities were not great. I'm sure something [inaudible] contributed heavily to this labor force around here.

Do you remember them being particularly rowdy? Did they frequent the bars?

How would I know that?

Did you hear about it?

I'm sure they were rowdy. Wilmington, that was a sleepy little town with a paper mill and a flour mill, feed mill, and a few garages, some churches and a restaurant on the intersection called Bullock's Restaurant. You know, almost overnight became boom town. Bullock's Restaurant, that would close. You know, we roll the side-walk up kind of thing, 24 hours a day. People who had rooms in their houses, would rent sleeping space to employees out here.

Both during the construction period and later?

And later, yes. And there were some temporary housing developments in Wilmington. Three of them that I bring to mind, North Crestwood is still a housing development. Whoa, here we go. Let's see, where's north?

(Looking at map.)

There's 66 there in the cut into Wilmington, right. That's the bend.

This is North Crest. See this pattern up here around the railroad? That's North Crest, and that exists today. Property bought by the government, houses built by the government and these weren't single-family, they were duplexes. So they were double-family dwellings. And the pattern still exists today and call them North Crest. This area was called South Crest, or Brookside by some. It exists today in that same geographic pattern.

And that was both duplex and single-family, wasn't it? Looks like it to me.

I won't comment there. I thought they were mostly duplexes, but they were minimal construction. Today, you can see sags in roof lines and things because there were 2 x 4s where there should have been 2 x 6s, that type of thing. But there wasn't time or money to . . . This area, out here on the curve, which you see a pattern of roads and buildings in here, this was bachelor quarters, I would say. This is crop land and this area is going to be the Baptist church. I don't know if the Baptist are aware of what went on there before or not, but they're going to build a church there.

And there was a trailer camp on this island and the Kankakee River? Do you remember about that?

Yes, I remember a little about that. But South Island, not North Island. It was South Island, as I recall. Almost totally South Island, because I remember being in there. There was a Navy plane ran into mechanical trouble in the early days of the war, and landed in the Kankakee River upstream of the dam and [inaudible]. And we drove in there to see the airplane. If I get too lengthy here, just say so. I'm sorry.

That's okay. We've got plenty of time. You say you're not very familiar with what the construction workers were like, but do you remember seeing them in town?

Yes, yes.

Twenty-four hours a day?

Right. You see the construction, for the most part, went on 24 hours a day out here. Now, there were certain things they couldn't do at night, but there were preparations going on at all times. So restaurants were open. Across the road from what is now called Richard's Farm.--No. It was called Richard's Farm. South Arsenal Road, and what's the correct terminology, Art, for South Arsenal Road, or is that it?

A. Holz: That or Road 2 South, either one.

H. Holz: All right. And at Road 2 South and the intersection of Road 1 West, that's Richard's Farm. That was a farm owned by Dick Richards, prior to government purchase.

A. Holz: Which corner of that intersection?

H. Holz: Northwest corner. Across the road from that, there was built a restaurant, a 24-hour-a-day restaurant.

Who was it run by?

Couldn't tell you. Couldn't tell you. But people were always hungry and people were always going and coming from work.

And the Richard's Farm was where their temporary construction camp was, wasn't it? I think that's . . .

Yes. The contractor who built this plant was Sanderson and Porter. Stone and Webster built the Kankakee side. Sanderson and Porter set up shop in Richard's farm. They used the house for offices, they used the other buildings for shops and what have you, if you were from motorpool, [you] parked in front of the barn.

Why didn't Simmerton, which was so close . . . they didn't seem very affected by all of this.

That's a good question.

Do you think because it was off the beaten path, whereas Wilmington was right near 66?

No. I really don't believe so, because after growing up around Simmerton, they didn't really welcome what was happening out here, and it was a unified agreement that this was not going to be good. So Simmerton didn't open its arms to this thing, really. The biggest impact on Simmerton was that farm houses that had any quality were made available for sale. And house movers moved them off of the plant and some of them came into Simmerton. That was the building boom in Simmerton. The west side of that street, on the west side of Simmerton, when you go in there, except for Bob [inaudible] house, every one of those houses was moved in from the arsenal.

Were they homes for people who were working here?

No, they were maybe people that lived in the arsenal and were too old to move a farming operation, sold the farm operation and said, well, Simmerton's home; that's where I want to live. They bought a house, bought a lot on the west side of that road, and they moved the house in there and moved into it. I would have to say that every person that lived on the west side of Simmerton, as a result of those houses being moved, people that were in the community and just continued to live here.

Just moved a little bit.

Yeah, and they were not transient arsenal workers. Something that I wanted to add to that. What was it? No, we did not build any 24-hour restaurants in Simmerton. No big impact commercially in Simmerton.

No new businesses.

None. None.

It sounds like most the workers came from the north, so I'm not surprised. Although I am surprised that Elwood didn't change particularly, being right in the midst of all of this.

They, too, were not hungry for boom town. Wilmington was a little more open-minded about this thing, I guess, and it had a greater impact on Wilmington. Manhattan was not greatly impacted. The biggest impact in this area was Wilmington. No question. The housing you saw in that aerial photograph and the businesses that swung up, the restaurants and things of that kind, no doubt about it.

So we were talking about your second job at the arsenal, which was as a munitions inspector. When was that? Was that during the winter?

No. I graduated from high school and looking for something to do in the summer.

So this was the summer of '41?

Summer of '41, and knew someone in the government circles out here. There was, of course, a government unit out here. I'll call it that. Because they were the quality control of the place. At that time, there were some operations going on. That's how quickly this thing came to be. I remember construction starting, if I'm right about this, if I get the years wrong, please correct me. I'm not embarrassed easily, but I believe construction started in the late '40s. I'm talking about the 1940 crops that were in the field. They were for the most part harvested by the farmers that lived there. But there were some corn fields in the way of critical construction, and they just bulldozed them and went ahead. And critical construction would consist of the groups 1, 3A, 2, 3. By the way, can you tell me why they are named 1, 3A, 2 and 3?

No. None, no clue.

I've never heard it. In 50 years, I've been trying to find that out and nobody knows. Some guy came in on Monday morning and wanted to be funny. I don't know. 1, 3A, 2 and 3. I've never understand that. And everything oriented northeast, southwest. The only thing that explains that is the northeast - southwest direction of the [inaudible] Road on the east side of that property. That's the only thing that explains it. And that's too logical. It's got to be something else.

No, it does follow that line. Those are the edges of the facility. It runs the railroad line. Because they didn't need it on the other side of that.

And the railroad that isn't there.

A. Holz: Our theory about that [inaudible], the last I knew of, when you take the [inaudible] and you got a railroad track there. It was just taking [inaudible] hit that and it swung over across Chicago Road.

H. Holz: And there it goes. Who cares about Chicago Road? [Inaudible].

A. Holz: We're going to win.

H. Holz: That was the Walbash Railroad. And I got to get this in there. We were a mile and three-quarters, the home farm was a mile and three-quarters from the edge of the plant, which was the Walbash Railroad. Critical of this conversation is 'was', because the Walbash Railroad no longer exists, as you've learned by now. It was sold a couple of times and has been since completely dismantled. There is no railroad track there. Okay, when we learned to drive horses as kids, we'd be out in the field, and we were poor. We didn't have a watch. So how do you know when to quit in the evening and you're driving a team of horses? There were two passenger trains on the Walbash Railroad that ran on schedule, 4:30 and 5:30. And when that 5:30 train went, dad said you can quit. And I think the horses always heard the train before I did. [Inaudible]. No cabs on those elevators or anything like that. You'd hear that train whistle. You got to the end, you went home. And that's how you knew when it was quitting time. And we just grew up with the idea there will always be a Walbash Railroad track. And when the arsenal came along, we thought there will always be a Joliet Arsenal. Wrong twice.

When did the railroad close? Do you remember? In the '70s?

No. More recent than that.

Sure, after the arsenal was . . .

But in the late '80s, they finally discontinued operations of the railroad track and took up the ties and trackage. And there is talk now of right away it becoming a bike path.

So back to being a munitions inspector, what was your job?

These were 250 pound SAPS, semi-armor piercing bombs--the more I talk, the less sophisticated the job will get--but there was a center line painted on that bomb, around the circumference of the bomb. It was painted with a stencil that the bomb rolled over. And it rolled over a stencil that a fellow would keep paint, and the stencil said Joliet Army Ammunition Plant or Elwood Plant and a date and a center line. And the center line had to do with how you hung that bomb in the bomb bay. You put the center line on a mark in the bomb bay, so there was some fore-aft adjustment. That's why the center line had to be on that bomb. Basically, that was the center of gravity of the completed bomb. And I had a T-square, no, I had a large right angle that I would place over the bomb and bump the shorter leg of the angle against the nose of the bomb and at the pointer on the long leg of that right triangle better indicate the center line. If it was off some amount, it was a reject. But all I did was check the center line on that bomb when it rolled off the shipping bay.

[Inaudible].

(Recorder is turned off.)

We're back and we were talking about munitions inspection in the summer of 1941, and you were looking at a center line, and if the white center line on the bomb wasn't quite right, you had to reject it. Do you remember how often that happened? And what happened when you rejected one? Did it just get . . . the stencil get taken off and put on again?

The reject numbers were rather low because when you think back, it's amazing. Here they are building bombs, bombs being built by people that didn't build bombs the year before, bombs built with equipment that is not a shelf item. If you need a start pump for your car, you go to Daniels in Wilmington, he's got one just like you got, take it out and you're out the door. The equipment that you build a bomb with was not a shelf item. Nobody had this stuff ready to go. Much of it was developed as the process began, as operations began. This device that stenciled the bomb in the shipping building of Group 3, it grabbed that bomb by the nose and the tail, and it had to hold it within some limits because it held the bomb while it rolled. It was like a lathe, if you will. The center points would hold this bomb and it rolled the bomb over the stencils, which were fixed in a top of a table. And you could change those for different times on different dates and so on. But this was a crude looking affair with a lot of pluses and minuses in the mechanism itself. Yeah, if somebody grabbed a bomb and didn't get it held tight in those holding devices that rolled it over the stencil, yeah, your center line was off and you rejected it. But rejects were--please don't hold me to this, but for center line, which I had to deal with, they wouldn't have been two or three percent at the most, and they would pull them off the line in a manual manner. You derailed them and rolled them off to the side and some fellow over there would use paint thinner or paint remover and take that center line off before it really dried. He'd take it off and it'd come back through.

How quickly did you inspect a bomb? How long did it take? Just a few minutes to check each one?

For what I was doing, not even seconds. You put that device, that gage, if you will, you held it on the bottom as it rolled past you and you made sure that center line fell under the arrow that was out there, the indicator. So the inspection of the center line didn't slow the production of that bomb two seconds. It just rolled by you when you did it.

A. Holz: How frequently--I have to ask--did the bomb roll past? Did the bomb roll by a bomb a minute, a bomb an hour?

H. Holz: You would see a bomb every . . . bombs per minute. You think of a bomb going by. Maybe every 15, 20 seconds a bomb goes by you. There were a lot of people there. It was a noisy place.

Which building were you in on Group 3?

Building 10 was the shipping building, the very end building, built with a series of parallel walls, concrete walls, and very durable, sturdy concrete walls, and there'd be a hole in the wall where that bomb rolled into your bay, where you were stenciling, so that if something happened in your bay, it was technically not supposed to affect the adjacent bay. And that plan held true when Group 2 blew up.

And you were there?

No, I was not there. It blew up before I went to work there. That building blew up in like May or June of '42. Okay. And I was working after that date because the doors -- I told you one day -- the doors on the buildings in the adjacent Group 3 were caved or buckled inward from the concussion of that explosion. I remember that. So I either wasn't at work . . . I wasn't working when it blew; I knew that. I might have been on the [inaudible] and it blew at night and I worked day shift most of the time, something like that.

It was early in the morning, 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning.

Okay. You've heard about that then. I wasn't, fortunately enough, closely involved with it. But it was a tragedy that . . . mom thought there was a thunderstorm. Now, we're a mile-and-three-quarters from the property line of the arsenal. How far were we from Group 2? Two-and-three-quarters? Okay. And when mom came into the kitchen in the morning, there was a petunia, probably, but a flower in a pot on the window sill over the kitchen sink, it was laying broken in the kitchen sink in the morning. And she assumed that there was a thunderstorm with some wind that blew it in. By noon, Uncle Sever, who lives there, [inaudible], and Uncle [inaudible] drove over to see if we were all right, because they heard about the explosion over there, and we hadn't heard about the explosion. And they drove in to see if we were okay.

When you started as a munitions inspector, did you have a choice of jobs?

No. No. I wasn't smart enough to know what I wanted. (Laughs)

What was it like, working on a daily basis there, did you take a break for lunch, where did you eat, what did you wear?

Oh, I thought it was the easiest job I ever had, you know, because you put on almost like a surgical white coat, if you will. You didn't know anything, but they made you look like something, in there with all these grumps, but it was great to have a job there, because then you could buy a car and all [inaudible].

And you did?

Yes. Thirty-seven Ford. I wish I had it today.

So could you take a lunch break?

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

And what did you eat?

There were change houses. The groups . . . you've got to admire the people that designed those loading lines, because they provided space between operations, a parallel wall to provide safety from adjacent operation in the event of an accident. When Group 2 blew up the shipping building, I was never there. I don't know if all the walls went down or not, but the next building didn't blow because of the space between the buildings, and these spaces . . . there was a concrete ramp with a cover on it, and this was the artery

through which production moved. In the case of bombs, you sat on their nose and built them from the tail and they were in a rack. And each rack was about the size of what we call a pallet today, and you'd set that pallet in the pour bay and pour the TNT into them. They went into another bay and were cooled and as they cooled, they settled [inaudible], but anyway, eventually they moved to the shipping building, and they came down to the shipping building through this ramp, which was covered, not heated. I don't think they were heated, but covered, concrete, and they came down the ramp in the rack they were poured, and the rack would be picked up . . . let's say a forklift, but it was a man pulled forklift. A little four wheeled cart was shoved under them and pumped the handle like a floor jack, picked it up and down the ramp it would go. And guys pulled them. And you wouldn't do it today.

Were you concerned about safety, about these bombs heading at you? Were you ever concerned about that?

No. Never gave it a thought. At that age, you really didn't think anything was going to happen to you. Kids are that way today. I was in World War II and you didn't think anything was ever going to happen. Didn't worry about it. You did your thing and lived your life and that sort of thing. I was in the Reserves and was recalled for Korea, and got back to [Inaudible] Field, outside of St. Louis to be back to active duty. And then I was like all the other guys that were being called back--scared to death. But something happened and that was 1952 maybe. So between '42 and '52 something, the environment, something emotionally, shifted gears in a guy's head, and not only myself, but everybody else was scared to fly. Wanted nothing to do with it. So no, I didn't worry about a bomb going off, and the doors were still caved in from when one did. (Laughs) it was a land mine that went off in Group 2.

What was the typical day? When you would get to the plant, what would happen? You'd come through the gate and what would happen?

You had a badge that let you come through the main gate, the front gate, and your badge was color coded that would let you get into a particular group, in my case, Group 3. So you drove through the gate, drove in the parking lot of Group 3, and there were one, two parking lots adjacent to Group 3, on the south side--they're still there. And I would park in the easterly parking lot and you'd go through that guard gate, pedestrian gate, [inaudible] another group. There were vehicle gates for trucks and maintenance and so on, but we walked through a pedestrian gate. The guard checked you to be sure you had a badge that was authorized to that group. And you went to the change house with your sack lunch or whatever you were carrying. We had a locker and we were government inspectors. Familiarity breeds contempt. We were the officers of the outfit and they separated us a little bit in the change house. We were the elite (laughs).

Were you checked for matches every day?

Oh, yes.

Where was that done, in the change house or at the guard house?

Can't remember. It may have been at both points. I'm not sure. I can't remember. I don't smoke, didn't smoke. Don't know. I was interested in quitting time and pay day.

And then you ate your sack lunch in the change house at lunch time and you had a half-an-hour for lunch?

Can't remember that, but I'm sure it was adequate. I thought it was a snap [inaudible].

But you weren't allowed to go anyplace else on the plant?

Oh, no. Oh, no.

Just stay right there?

That's right. You did not meander around. Right. You didn't go around the group, either. You worked where you were assigned and no place else. And there were (coughs - excuse me). This is the third day. You cough with a cold. There were security people within the group and they weren't checking everybody for a particular thing, but they made sure that if you looked like you didn't belong where you were, they would approach you.

A. Holz: What kind of security were they?

H. Holz: Government employees. They were operating contractors. They were in uniform, carrying a gun.

A. Holz: *[Inaudible]*.

H. Holz: Yes, I'm sure they were. Now, wait a minute. In the early days of this side of the plant, the Elwood side of the plant, everybody was government. There was no operating contract until 1965 when Uniroyal became the operating contractor.

A. Holz: *[Inaudible]*.

That was Kankakee, owned by Kankakee. U.S. [inaudible] took over from Dupont in '44. But Sanderson and Porter ran this side, the Elwood side.

They built it.

They built it, but they also operated it.

They were the construction contractor.

And operated it as well.

Did they operate it as well? So then the guards would have been Sanderson and Port.

A. Holz: When the government operated it, it was still government employees. *[Inaudible]*.

Yeah, after the war.

And the government operated the Elwood side until 1965, when it became a GOCO, government owned, contractor operated.

What did you do after work during the war? You went to the theater in Wilmington?

Yeah, we'd go to the show *[inaudible]*. Remember being in *[inaudible]* after a show. What a mob of people. They were always going.

What about the USO?

There was one. Yeah.

Did you go?

Something happened to Pat in the USO. (Laughs)

[Inaudible]. We've been reading about it that it was on Water Street in Wilmington.

[Inaudible] people that age. Yeah.

A. Holz: Where?

On Water Street?

H. Holz: Yes. South of the lights. On the west side of the street. Remember where Daniels used to be?

A. Holz: Yes.

H. Holz: Bingo.

A. Holz: Next door to the theater.

H. Holz: North of the theater, right. Yep, *[inaudible]* the USO.

A. Holz: *[Inaudible]*?

H. Holz: Had a glass front, yeah.

Did the folks in Wilmington . . . what did they think about the people that were moving in to the area and the ones that were moving into the houses, eventually, where more people that worked at the plant, I assume, than construction people, but what about all the earlier ones even that were living in the town?

How did they feel about . . .

How did the Wilmington people feel about the people that were moving in?

Okay. I would say they didn't care for the average quality of the people because they were transient in nature and in thinking. They didn't like the transient nature of them, and they were party people. Taverns did very well.

And how many taverns were there in Wilmington? Do you remember?

She keeps thinking that I must . . . where's that come from, anyway? There were a bunch of them. I won't attempt that.

A bunch.

Yeah, everybody, you know. There were quite a few taverns in Wilmington. In those days, they did develop some new taverns, but they didn't develop any new churches. So I think the local people didn't care a lot for the quality of people who were coming to town. They like their money. They liked their money.

Was there a change in feeling when the houses were finally built and people were moving and more families were coming in?

There was a change in feeling, but I don't think it came with the housing thing. It came when the plant went from construction to operation.

(End of Side 1; Beginning of Side 2)

. . . I want to finish the point on how they felt about people. Because when they got into operations, and Ordinance Ammunition come in, that brought in a different type of person.

When was that? Do you remember approximately, what decade?

Oh, let's see. Then we got into World War II and I was gone. Oh, in the late '40s for sure. There had been a tremendous change in people climate in Wilmington between 1941 and 2 and 3 till 1948, ten years later, big change.

And less of them.

Less of them, but that brought the '50s, the early '50s and on, brought in the people who were in rotary, that brought the Sunday school teachers, that brought guys running for City Council, that type of person. Okay.

Someone who was going to join in with the community and work to make it better.

Right. Yeah, yeah. They were family types and they were community oriented and they coached Little League and they did those things that the 1940 group, 41, 2, 3 group didn't. Cared less for it.

Did those earlier groups bring their families? Or were they more single men than family people?

They did not bring their families. That, I know. Art, the house that we bought, that you grew up in, we're living in a house that was . . . it's how old, Art?

A. Holz: [*Inaudible*] built in the 1860s [*inaudible*].

H. Holz: By Doctor Willard. And I bought that house in 1950 . . . earlier than that, I believe. [*Inaudible*].

A. Holz: Fine.

H. Holz: Bought it from a Mrs. Jerome and she had kept arsenal construction workers at one time at that house. Rather large house, and yes, she had arsenal construction workers living there when we bought, before we bought it, okay? And like I say, they didn't like so much the lifestyle of the people, but they liked the money. And a big change when the Ordinance Ammunition came in, later named APSA, when that developed. They were good people for the community, because they were the people that were in churches and civic organizations and Little League and things of that kind, and I would say that one of the big negative impacts on Wilmington was when APSA moved to Rock Island, which they did in . . . when, Bob?

Bob: 1973

A. Holz: Because that took so many of these families out of Wilmington that was civic-minded, okay? They delivered. But there are still families in Wilmington that came in during the production days of the arsenal.

?: Sam Harris did.

A. Holz: Kay Shay, you remember the name Elmer Shay? He just died a little while ago? Shays came in. Rudy Ray came in for the arsenal. You can go down and you can list a lot that came in because they made their home and stayed and they were the kind of people that they've been good for Wilmington. They do. A lot of good people. You know, this country was developed by people that weren't afraid to move, and there had to be a little bit of that in these people that came in. There was some courage to do that, and people like that usually get something done.

Did you have another job at the plant during World War II, besides being a munitions inspector?

Art, did I? (Laughs)

You went into . . .

I went into the service, then, in 1942. So no, I didn't.

Art mentioned you participated in the Ag Lease program. Was that during World War II? Or was that later?

Okay. Later. When I came home from the service in '45, my father had a agricultural lease here at the installation, which is now Tract 4. He had that.

On the Elwood side?

Yes. Right.

?: During the war?

H. Holz: Had it during the war, yep.

What did he grow?

Soy beans and hay and corn.

?: Pop corn.

H. Holz: No, Bob. Field corn.

?: Had a lot of popcorn out here at one time, too.

H. Holz: We did, yes we did have a lot of popcorn here. But when I came home from the service in 1945, the end of '45, your grandfather, my dad, had passed away Flag Day.

?: The birth of the Flag Day.

H. Holz: Birth of the Flag Day, of '45. And I got out of the service and we harvested the crops when I came home in December. And there was corn on tract 4, because we shoveled it in the field and what else was there I can't remember, but I remembered the soy beans and the hay and I know there as corn because we harvested.

?: Did your brother help you?

H. Holz: He wasn't home as early as I was. I have a brother who owns a [inaudible] in the South Pacific, and I got home first. And then he came home a little later, but he was not there for the harvest.

?: Did he work here [inaudible] time? I guess in [inaudible]?

H. Holz: Kim was a boy. He had a knack. He's always had a knack. He's had some good jobs, but he's had some great positions, and he . . . Hauffman, Colonel Hauffman was the commanding officer. No, Doyle was the commanding officer, and he was Doyle's chauffeur. You know Doyle Lank? Bingo. Yeah. And he drove the commanding officer to the explosion site in Group 2. And I remember him saying, -- of course, he was a Colonel. He went right through the gate. They passed him right through. And they got within some distance, like a quarter-of-a-mile and they had a flat tire from hitting junk and debris on the road from the explosion the night before. And he got chewed out when he went to work at 8:00. His boss was disappointed that he wasn't there earlier because he should have known about the explosion, and he was two plus or minus three miles from the explosion site. But that explosion had an impact like an umbrella. That's why [inaudible] felt it worse than we did, a whole city, more than we did, and we were next door to it.

And you thought it was a thunderstorm?

Mom thought it was a thunderstorm, so Kim went to work at the usual time and the Colonel was looking for his driver to get him to the explosion.

?: Well, even now [inaudible]. [Inaudible] like during the week when you're here working [inaudible], you can hear [inaudible], and that's only about four miles north of [inaudible].

H. Holz: For me, everything goes back to corn and soy beans and that reference and cattle. For them, everything goes back to golf.

?: We're trying to decide what would be the best place for the golf course. We're really seriously thinking about tracts 2 and 3. [Inaudible].

H. Holz: It's highly erodible soil.

?: That's okay. We can handle that.

I'm going to ask you a bit more day-to-day things during World War II. When you drove to the plant, did you car pool?

No, because I lived, from the main gate, one, two, three, four miles, and there was nobody around there to car pool with. I'd have had to go to Joliet to get into a car pool.

?: What gate was the gate that you used?

H. Holz: On the south side Chicago Road had a guard shack and a guard in it. Many of the perimeter gates, not all, but many of them had a guard shack and a guard and you could drive in there going to work. Gate 25, very busy gate.

Where's that?

[Inaudible]. Where's that?

?: [Inaudible].

?: [Inaudible].

H. Holz: Yep, and that was a road that went directly into Wilton Center, which was Highway 52. That road was also a county road from across there to Wilton Center. There are now interstates, interstate highways and there were then state highways. 52 was a state highway. 66. Then there were county road, maintained by the county, as compared to all other roads that were township roads, and county roads were better maintained because of heavier traffic. That was a county road for years.

?: Concrete bridge instead of steel?

H. Holz: Yeah, that sort of thing. Wider road bed, better snow plowing, better gravel maintenance.

?: [Inaudible].

?: The township didn't have funds to make that kind of . . . all they did was just kept the road open as best they could.

H. Holz: That's right. [Inaudible]. I could be here all day.

Did you have to register with the personnel office as to where you lived and how you were driving in?

I can't . . .

Rationing books for gasoline and . . .

We had rationing books, yes, but registration from where I lived, how I got here, I can't add to that question. Gasoline, we were farmers and we had enough gasoline to do what we wanted to do. We had plenty of ration stamps. I don't want to discredit agriculture, but you know, so a couple gallons that were supposed to go in the tractor wound up in the car. Nobody looked.

When exactly were you working as a munitions inspector? Was it summer of '41 through into '42, just before you went into the service, was about a year?

It was less than a year. Because I did a semester of junior college, and that had to be the Fall semester of '41.

Do you remember very many minorities living in this area?

No. No.

Do you remember very many minorities working at the plant at all?

No, I don't. We saw very few minorities in the community that I was in. There was a leasee north of Simmertown. He came from Mommence area and his name was . . . he had a Black man that used to run a combine and that was a very unusual sight. Booshart? That was it. He had Alice [inaudible] combines, two combines and two John Deere tractors and it was a Black man running one of those. Very unusual sight.

He wasn't Jamaican?

No, he was Black. He was African. Right. Very unusual sight and I can't remember anybody . . . I know there was no Black person on our [inaudible], none.

On your construction crew?

Well, that labor crew that I was on when we cleaned the corn stalks off the north power site, there were no Black guys on that crew. The Black population wasn't here the way we know it today. South Chicago Street in Joliet, there was an AMP store on South Chicago Street at . . . a Mr. Matson owned it. My folks would stop there and buy groceries and there were no Black people around that area, which is totally Black today. We did not have the population. I think that much of that population moved up, as I believe history says, from the wages that were being made available during the industrial revolution of World War II in this area, Detroit and I believe they came from those dollars. But they weren't here at that point. People from southern Illinois were here. Joe Seinicky was a guard at the arsenal. And he got to looking at this farm land. He's from some place in southern Illinois. I'll have to ask his son-in-law, who is my chiropractor, but he come up and was a guard at the plant and he got to looking at all this land around here and thought, that's better looking land than I ever saw in southern Illinois, and he started getting some leases, and he became a close friend of Sweet Ericson in Elwood, who ran a garage and a maintenance shop. And he and . . . Joe Seinicky was an aggressive kind of a guy and he wound up with a caterpillar tractor for field work and worked many of those around. He said to Ericson, over and over, that caterpillar is a great thing when you get it where you want to use it, but it takes so long to get it from field to field. And Ericson . . . that was the thing to say to him, because pretty soon they built the first four wheel drive rubber tire tractor that I ever saw or ever heard of. They built it in Elwood, home of Big 4.

?: Speaking of that, this touches on something else. You know, there are a lot of shortages for [inaudible] back in America because of the war effort and wasn't there something significant about the tractor that your dad bought?

H. Holz: Yeah. Yes. Because of the priority given to rubber products, tires mainly, or the mission of the war department, farm tractors, we just started putting them on rubber tires in the late '30s and that was very controversial. I remember 'a tire can't pull a plow'. But I could get on that [inaudible], but Ed [inaudible] had the first rubber tired [inaudible] in our community. Every Spring they'd move brooder houses. I'm talking about life on the farm 1936, 7, right in there. In the Spring of the year, they'd move the brooder house, where you would start the new chicks, to fresh ground. And you'd do that in March. And all the neighbors wanted Ed [inaudible] to do that with his rubber tire tractor and a frost would be coming in on the ground and he couldn't move a brooder house, a little 10 x 10 brooder house and that tractor would not move it. It'd sit there and spin. And dad would go get a team of horses and pull it. Early rubber tire tractors, you'll never, never last. Well, pretty soon they decided they were great because the steel wheels were very inefficient, power consuming, pushing that [inaudible] in the ground and everybody went to rubber tires. But when the war effort came along, then the manufacturers went back to steel wheels because they could not get rubber tires for the tractors and my dad bought a Farm All H Model 1941 from the dealer in [inaudible], Illinois, and it was the last rubber tire tractor he had. And we still have it. That's right. It was the end of rubber tires. First thing a guy wanted to do was get rid of those steel wheels on those new tractors. Rubber tires came out with a road gear. They would travel 15 miles an hour, but you couldn't sit on it with steel wheels going 15 miles an hour. So the manufacturers, they put a bolt in the shifting mechanism so you couldn't shift them into fifth gear. The gears were there, but you couldn't use them because they were locked out for safety reasons. That was the [inaudible] tractor. The first four wheel drive rubber tire tractor was made in Elwood. It's called Big 4. Everybody loved . . . and it was amazing. He would pull a five or a six bottom plow [inaudible] go down the road 15 miles an hour to the next field.

?: In the '40s?

H. Holz: Yeah, late '40s. That tractor today, is owned by -- and I met him the other day at Our Place Restaurant in Morris. We took Linda and Terri Anderson out for dinner the other night. It's not great, but it's a nice place to go have [inaudible] and Terri knew this fellow in the [inaudible] and it turned out that he is one of the antique tractor club in [inaudible] County, and he has Sweet Ericson's original Big 4.

?: what's the guy's name?

H. Holz: I can't remember. That was last Saturday night. I can remember '51 and '41, but I can't remember Saturday night?

?: You have cream and sugar in your coffee this morning?

H. Holz: Yeah, no! (Laughs) By the way, Sweet put a [inaudible] engine in that tractor and the fellow told me, I said to him, how's that [inaudible] running, when he told me what he had. He said, the son-of-a-bitch, I can't get parts for it.

?: [Inaudible].

H. Holz: He said, "I'm about ready to put in a Detroit."

So how did Wilmington, or at least this area, change right after the arsenal closed at the end of the war? Become lots quieter, almost immediately?

You see. . . No, not a jolt type of impact. By the way, do you folks know that the wide spot in the road just south of here was a state scale? The State of Illinois put a scale down there.

?: It's just right down the road here.

H. Holz: Right, on the right-hand side. If the subject matter weaves a little bit, it's the way I think. But there was a scale down there that the State of Illinois would weigh trucks on.

?: Right across from where that other house is down there.

H. Holz: Pretty close. And the man that lived here was Oscar Morgan and he owned that land over there, and Oscar Morgan said, "Yeah, I'll give you some land to build the scale," because they needed more (coughs) easement, but I don't know whether he sold them the dirt or not, I don't know, but he did say, I would like the privilege of being able to use the scale. So if I can have a key to the scale house . . . Then they got together. Because Kim and I had some 4H steers that came from Oscar Morgan and we weighed them on that scale.

?: One other question. What was this facility across the road? What was its first intent ownership and about when was it built?

H. Holz: It was a pumping station, Sinclair Oil Pumping Station, or pipelines heading toward Chicago. And this was a steam operated pumping station, and all those tanks that are now grain storage tanks, the big flat ones, they were petroleum tanks, crude oil tanks.

And when did that go in?

I don't remember its being built.

?: Is the smoke stack still the chimney?

H. Holz: Yeah.

?: There are a couple tanks along the road here. I think they've been demolished, haven't they?

H. Holz: Couple of tanks along . . .

?: Weren't there a couple of big tanks just down the west side of the road?

H. Holz: Close to [inaudible]?

?: Yeah.

H. Holz: I don't remember that.

?: Yeah. There's one over there. I thought there was another one over here. There's one on the hill.

H. Holz: I can't tell you that. I can't tell you when they were built. Don't know. But that operated as a pumping station until it became . . . Al Brook from Kankakee purchased the property and made it into an Alfalfa dehydrating mill, alfalfa grown here on the installation.

And when was that? When did he do that?

I'm going to try to give you a number. (Pause) I would say he started that in the early '60s, '60 to '65.

?: You mentioned that this pumping station was steam operated.

H. Holz: That is correct.

?: and that would explain this big smoke stack would have been . . .

H. Holz: Yes, coal fire.

?: Right.

H. Holz: The railroad siding was to bring in coal.

?: How about utilities around here? Did the arsenal have any impact on that? Was electric and phone already available in this area?

H. Holz: I won't attempt the communication. The electrical power to the installation (coughs) . . . Electrical power came from two sources to this plant. They fed it into the Kankakee unit from the north, and that feeder is still there. Okay? Came off that tower line probably. (Coughs) Came off that tower line that we were looking at in the picture or trying to find in the picture. That fed power to the Kankakee unit. I'm assuming it came off that line. There was another feeder came into the Elwood side, and by the way, they are connected, Elwood to Kankakee. That connection is still there at the railroad overpass approximately.

?: I'm trying to get it removed.

H. Holz: There are builders and there are wreckers.

?: My question was then that was here; that this place didn't have any impact on the community as far as development of those utilities?

H. Holz: The capacity was in the vicinity, but it was not localized. Because they brought a pole line into the Elwood unit from the north and that came in a mile-and-a-half east of Chicago Road gatehouse. They

brought an H pole line, if you will, down the center section of that second section, and that fed into the Elwood unit. And I think it's been taken out, but our line to it, there may still be evidence of it there. On our property, there may be some evidence of where that line came in. That's where the power came from, electrically. The communications, I can't tell you about that. I don't know how that developed.

?: [Inaudible] you already had that?

H. Holz: We did not have electricity at the farm until 1945. We had telephone. My folks put in a telephone. It was in the vicinity, but we didn't have a telephone until Kim and I went into World War II, and my folks thought they should have a telephone so that we could call home, and that was the Manhattan Telephone System, and there's got to be a second or two for that one. The Manhattan telephone system was privately owned. You know, you don't like AT&T and Ameritech and Illinois Bell. You should have tried the Manhattan Telephone System. That was a party line that came out of Manhattan and it went to Simmertown. There were 12 parties on that party line, one of which was the Simmertown Grain Elevator. Now, you had a hand-cranked phone that hung on the wall, and I wish I had it today, because it would be a tremendous thing to do something with. It wasn't when you were glad to see it go. But that was a hand-cranked phone that hung on the wall. And you turned the crank to get the operator, and then you'd tell her the number you wanted, unless you called somebody on your line, and then you knew what their rings were. The ring at the farm was a long and three shorts. So the phone was ringing and you just listened, you hear a long and three shorts; that was for you. But that didn't mean that you didn't pick it up anyway to see what was going on, which everybody did. Oh. Oh boy. You could go on and on about the Manhattan Telephone System. That came out of a little, very modest building in Manhattan, and now this was 24 hours a day, so in that office was a room with a cot in it and there was somebody there 24 hours a day. If the board rang at night, that person would get up and say, "Hello, what the hell do you want?" or something like that, see. And everybody was supposed to turn it off at 8:00 at night. That was the Manhattan Telephone System. Tell you how they went out of business. We had an ice storm in the late '40s.

?: Forty-nine, '49 to '50.

H. Holz: Is your name on this tape?

?: It was at Easter time.

H. Holz: That's right. That is right. And it was a hell of an ice storm, and the crew went out of Manhattan with their maintenance truck and they must have had ten of these poles, long poles with a point on the end of them, because the first ten poles out of Manhattan had a prop up against them and they leaned against the prop. After that, they laid flat, Easter Sunday. And the company was out of business. The poles didn't work. Ed Case, our neighbor and somebody, went down and they patched together enough wire so that we could call Marvin Quiggly, Ed Case, the Simmertown Grain Elevator and a couple other local people by ringing their ring. But there was no operator. And the biggest thing you need to remember out of that -- oh, Bill Freely was on that line--that would be Mike and Dick's grandfather, and it was sometime after Easter, and Bill Quiggly got a bill from the Manhattan Telephone System for a month's service. And he was one mad Irishman. He went out to Manhattan with that bill. Oh, anyway. That was the Manhattan Telephone System.

And enough for the interview, actually. I think we're all set. Thank you so much. I wanted to mention, because I didn't at the beginning, this interview took place at the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant headquarters in Wilmington, Illinois, on Thursday, March 2, 1995.

(End of Interview)

DOROTHEA SMITH
March 3, 1995
Wilmington, Illinois
Rita Walsh & Patricia Wingo, Interviewers

This is Rita Walsh with Gray & Pape, Inc., Cincinnati, Ohio and with me are Patricia Wingo of Gray & Pape also, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Dorothea Smith of Wilmington, Illinois, who moved to the Wilmington area in 1944. And I'm just going to ask you a few questions about your experience moving here right at the end of the war and a little bit about what it was like living here after that time as well and then I have some other questions about Elwood and Wilmington, the comparison between the two towns as far as how they dealt with the building of the arsenal. Where did you live before moving to the plant in this area?

Well, my husband and I were both in North Wisconsin and when he was discharged early from the service because of a bad knee, football knee from high school, there were no jobs, you know, available in North Wisconsin because everything had gone war time industry and the big industry was down here in northern Illinois, the Joliet arsenal. And at that time they were just begging people to come. They were asking their own employees to please attract all of their relatives and my sister's husband was a chemist down here at the arsenal. Later, he was taken over to the Oak Ridge, Tennessee Manhattan project and then eventually up into the (Hanford?), Washington place but at the time when he was working here at the arsenal he invited us to come down and live just for the duration of the war. We could always move back to North Wisconsin, our favorite place. We came into Wilmington. My husband worked on a TNT line up at the arsenal.

At the Kankakee unit?

At the Kankakee units and, of course, they all carpooled. All of the men from our neighborhood would carpool up there. It was only a few miles.

And where did you live?

I looked over the housing in the North Crest subdivision which was government housing and there were still several vacant places in there.

And this was in 1944?

And this was August of '44 and I chose a four room house, two bedrooms, living room and kitchen. These were specially made for only arsenal workers and discharge service men and at the time the government also . . . oh, there were two different subdivisions, North Crest and Brookside, and the government built two grade schools, grades 1 through 4, one in each of the two developments and they had a big playground, they had a community center and also we had many special privileges, like getting together for Red Cross lessons, different kinds of, you know, first aid and even home skills, like we would be able to come over there and do all our home canning. We learned how to recycle. Believe me, we know recycling a way back. We've been, you know, opening both ends of our cans and flattening them out ever since the war. There were some materials not at all available. You couldn't buy rubber or metal for your life and I had a small child and a brand new baby born in December that year, washing machines were not available, dryers were not available and we just couldn't buy them. I scrubbed everything by hand.

Was it [inaudible] laundry in the [inaudible]?

Were there such things as laundromats in '44? I doubt it. I really do doubt it.

[inaudible]

Or disposable diapers. *(laughter)* But this way by pooling our resources, the women of these two neighborhoods managed to form a nice little friendship of their own but the townspeople considered us outsiders. We felt some resentment because these people in Wilmington were of a community that was already 100 years old. There were many retired farmers here in town, businessman, small industry. The biggest industry was the big papermill.

What was the company name?

Well, it went under several names but at the end it was the (Oranda?) Paper Corporation and then for a time it was called the *[inaudible]*. When it was first built back in the 1800s, it was American Straw Board Company because they would use old cardboard and manufacture paper. Well, they would buy old rags and manufacture paper out of it but the higher social echelons of town just were a group unto themselves. We war brides and war families were not part of them. I think they sort of resented the fact that the government gave us so many good bonuses for living here and for working in the arsenal. But then many townspeople also went to work at the arsenal and they became very patriotic about renting out their bedrooms to the arsenal workers and a large barracks was built for single men right on the edge of town.

Right where that curve is.

Yes, right there. And many men came here to work without their families and they needed places to stay so there wasn't a vacant house or room in town. Those people were good and they were organized. Some businesswomen and wives of businessmen who had been living all their lives but when the appeals came "We must help the war effort," they themselves were so active. They formed a Red Cross unit and what they call the Motor Corps for transporting servicemen. They built a USO, not built one but used one of the old stores downtown as USO for entertaining servicemen and, of course, every kind of contingent of men was taken by train to the training centers. There was a group of people that would come down there and see them off.

Did you go down to USO sometimes?

And, well, I had been in there a few times. I didn't make a habit of it. I think that many volunteer women did go there regularly to help out. No, I was not one of the helpers there. I was busy with my new baby, right.

What did you do for entertain? You were busy with your new baby. What did you do for fun? Did you do things [inaudible] neighborhood?

Oh, yes. It was a very neighborly group and, of course, we had this big children's playground and there were daily programs of activities and games for the children which was nice.

Who organized those?

Well, it was under some kind of government leadership. I don't think these were local people.

And most of the people in the neighborhood, that were from someplace else?

Yeah.

People who lived [inaudible]

We had moved in from all across the country.

Were many of the women working at the arsenal?

Oh, yes, yes. The arsenal had women [inaudible]

That lived in the subdivision as well?

Well, they were eligible and, of course, some of them [inaudible] with me but, yes, after the end of the war these people were allowed to buy the house that they were in for something like \$2,000 or whatever and so most of those houses still remain but they have been so beautified by shutters and porches and fences and gardens and shrubbery and all that stuff, you'd never recognize them. Each house is an individual [inaudible]

They are individual because we drove around and you could see a lot of similar [inaudible]

[Inaudible] that still looked like the [inaudible] little boxes or even duplexes because there were some that were made as a duplex and later on if the owners wanted to they could cut them in half and move one side away from the other and be separate.

Did they do that?

Oh, yes, many of [inaudible]

When you moved into yours did it have any landscaping?

No.

Were you the first [inaudible] to live in it?

Yes, that particular one happened to be an unoccupied house but most of the houses in the neighborhood were already taken because people started moving in in 1943, possibly '42 and we didn't come until August of '44.

And on the list that you, oh, Federal Public Housing Authority, okay, that's who is overseeing this project that was overseas [inaudible].

Yeah, and you can see there are hundreds of names down here. Yes, later on we were able to do our own planting of shrubbery and gardens and so on. And we had fun because behind our house was an empty field because we were out on the outer rim, outer [inaudible] and that would flood in the winter and we had fun skating on that but otherwise it was quite a start situation at first.

Did your husband stay at the plant after the war?

Well, when the plant closed then he was out of a job temporarily but they took him on as a painter to maintain the old buildings and then later on when we did not choose to stay in our house we rented a farm out in the country on 102, off of 102 in the woods there, and we were close to that big Texas oil pumping station and so he got a job out there. And after six years there he began working for the post office and he's been a rural carrier until his retirement in 1982. But I do remember that while he was at the arsenal, working in that TNT, which was a powder, a very toxic powder, he did develop a horrible skin rash that covered both of his arms and hands and in those days there was no such thing as unemployment pay (laughter) so he had to go to the hospital at his own expense, lost a good deal of pay [inaudible].

Which hospital? Was it Wilmington?

No, there's no Wilmington hospital. He was in a Joliet hospital. There are two hospitals up there, St. Joseph and Silvercross. I don't remember which one he was at.

He had to go at his expense?

As far as I can remember. You know, I could be wrong about that. Surely the government would cover such . . .

Yeah, I understand that if someone developed dermatitis that a lot of people got handling . . . They would first of all treat it as far as I know and take them off that line. You know, take them right off.

Well, it was only that one incident. He did go back and work at the arsenal and it's possible that that was paid for. It was the only income we would have had, you know. You know, at the meantime at the old papermill downtown, those men were not covered with anything. If they were hurt, even at work, then they were either out of a job or they could come back after they were well but they would lose maybe a month's pay by being absent and they would pay for their own hospital but those were primitive conditions but that's the way it was in industry back in the 40s.

Do you remember what your husband made as a TNT worker? What his hourly rate was?

Wow, I bet even he doesn't remember. It was more than he was making in Wisconsin before we came down here, before he was called into the service.

What was he doing in Wisconsin?

He was in a big papermill up there, too, and I can remember when he finally came home one day and said, "Hey, I'm going to get \$25.00 a week now." And we felt so rich. *(laughter)* That was great. So I'm sure the arsenal was offering much more *[inaudible]*. And you see, our rent was low. Depending on the size house that you were renting, a one bedroom, two bedroom or three bedroom, you would pay \$27.50, \$32.50 or \$37.50 so we were in the \$32.00 house and he was probably making well over \$32.00 a week, I'm sure, but I honestly don't remember.

We get the sense that Wilmington, even though it sounds like it didn't welcome a lot of the outsiders, that they planned very well for this whole construction project and the hordes of people that were going to come in, whereas Elwood seemed to want to turn its back.

They were taken by surprise?

Elwood, well, I think they just tried to ignore it.

They were even closer.

I know.

And there were no big housing developments in Elwood. Now, many of the officers lived in the Elwood area because there were two special housing places, the White Circle and the Brown Circle, and the officers had beautiful homes in there and all of their maintenance was taken care of by the government. Yeah, we're still close friends with the *[inaudible]* Colonel who decided after the war that he would stay . . . he had been stationed all over the world but he decided he would stay right here and buy a house in Elwood.

Was that [inaudible]?

Oh, did you meet him?

No, we didn't meet him but [inaudible] told us about him.

[Inaudible] Yes, he had been stationed in many parts of the world and we got to know him through our church, the Lutheran church in Wilmington because that's where they came but, yeah, they're still very dear friends of ours. And the reason I didn't give you his name is because he came along after the arsenal was running but he was still connected with it or he wouldn't have lived up there in Brown Circle.

But do you have a sense of why Elwood reacted the way that it did and why Wilmington acted the way that it did? I'm sure it had a lot to do with the leadership . . .

Oh, yes.

. . . of the communities.

Businessmen leadership and city council leadership and so on. They realized what was coming and it got to a point where they told the people, "Do you want men sleeping in your doorways and in your bushes because they have no other place to sleep?" And so people were very, very good and we had nurses in Wilmington who organized a Red Cross chapter and, yeah, they gave first aid courses. I think I mentioned that. They really were very war minded, you might say, but Wilmington had also been very patriotic during World War I and during the Civil War. They were proud of having sent so many men to those wars and always making heroes of them when they came back.

It sounds like Wilmington fared better because it prepared for everything.

Oh, *[inaudible]* town. I don't know when it began.

I think pretty early. I think it was the 1830s or '40s when it started.

It was on the railroad line so it probably grew up after the 1850s. There was a grain elevator there.

There were two actually during World War II, actually just before World War II.

And there were some old churches in Elwood and around there. But it probably is not quite as old as Wilmington. We're from the 1830s.

Okay. You didn't live in Wilmington in the 50s. Obviously, you [inaudible] but do you have a sense that Wilmington finally started accepting the people who had worked at the arsenal in the 50s?

Oh, of course.

Even though there were still new people coming in.

Yeah, I have a funny story to tell you about one of my old lady friends who was my children's first grade teacher and also the sister-in-law of our *[inaudible]* and she was so disgusted with this new city council a couple of years ago because the city council wanted to tear down our historic old museum building and she said, "The trouble with these guys on the council, they don't know anything about Wilmington. They're just newcomers." And I said, "Well, some of them came with the arsenal back in '40s." And she said, "See what I told you? They're just newcomers." *(laughter)*

[inaudible] Well, I think that's about it.

Oh.

Thank you very much and I wanted to add on the tape because I neglected to say this at the beginning but this is Friday, March 3, 1995 and this interview is conducted at the Wilmington Public Library in Wilmington, Illinois.

(End of Interview)

APPENDIX A
RELEASE FORMS

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Bob Eaton
Address: 19922 West Noel Road
Elwood, Illinois 60421
Phone: (815) 423-5331

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview and of the tape made during this interview.

I also understand that tapes and transcripts of this interview will be archived at Alexandria, VA ^{U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Office of History} and will be available for research purposes to qualified persons unless otherwise specified below. Copies of the tapes and transcripts will be kept by Geo-Marine, Inc., 550 East 15th Street, Plano, Texas 75074, for their use in preparing project reports.

Restrictions:

☒ No Restriction
☐ Restrictions (specify):

Date 5/25/96 Interviewee(s) Robert Eaton
Signature(s) _____

Date _____ Interviewer
Signature _____

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Sam Harris
Address: 406 Timothy Lane
Galatia, Illinois 62935
Phone: 618-268-6702

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview and of the tape made during this interview.

I also understand that tapes and transcripts of this interview will be archived at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Office of History Alexandria, Virginia and will be available for research purposes to qualified persons unless otherwise specified below. Copies of the tapes and transcripts will be kept by Geo-Marine, Inc., 550 East 15th Street, Plano, Texas 75074, for their use in preparing project reports.

Restrictions:

☒ No Restriction
☐ Restrictions (specify):

Date 6/8/96

Interviewee(s)
Signature(s) Sam S. Harris

Date _____

Interviewer
Signature _____

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Harold A. Holz
Address: 121 South Joliet
Wilmington, Illinois 60481
Phone: _____

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview and of the tape made during this interview.

I also understand that tapes and transcripts of this interview will be archived at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Office of History Alexandria, VA. and will be available for research purposes to qualified persons unless otherwise specified below. Copies of the tapes and transcripts will be kept by Geo-Marine, Inc., 550 East 15th Street, Plano, Texas 75074, for their use in preparing project reports.

Restrictions:

☒ No Restriction
☐ Restrictions (specify):

None

Date 17 May 96

Interviewee(s)
Signature(s)

Harold A. Holz

Date _____

Interviewer
Signature _____

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF INTERVIEW

Interviewee

Name: Dorothea Smith
Address: 70 Wilmington Public Library
Wilmington, Illinois 60481
Phone: _____

I am providing this information voluntarily. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcript of this taped interview and copies of the draft and final reports for this project. Upon request, Geo-Marine, Inc., will provide me with copies of notes taken during this interview and of the tape made during this interview.

I also understand that tapes and transcripts of this interview will be archived at Alexandria, VA ^{U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Office of History} and will be available for research purposes to qualified persons unless otherwise specified below. Copies of the tapes and transcripts will be kept by Geo-Marine, Inc., 550 East 15th Street, Plano, Texas 75074, for their use in preparing project reports.

Restrictions:

☒ No Restriction
☐ Restrictions (specify):

Date 5-17-1996 Interviewee(s) Dorothea A. Smith
Signature(s) _____

Date _____ Interviewer
Signature _____

It is understood that our public library will receive a copy of the final publication of the Joliet Arsenal history.